

~~Public Libraries~~

~~Adult Lending Library~~

~~HOURS.~~

~~ADULT LENDING LIBRARY~~

~~**OPEN** from 10 a.m. till 8 p.m. (except on Wednesdays, when it closes at 1 p.m.) **CLOSED** on Sundays and public holidays.~~

~~JUVENILE LENDING LIBRARY~~

~~**OPEN.** Monday to Friday, 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. **CLOSED** on Wednesdays, Sundays and public holidays.~~

~~**RENEWALS.** The issue of a book may be renewed for a further period of 15 days. When a book is not **returned** for renewal, notice must be given in writing, stating the last date stamped on the date label, author and title of book and borrower's name.~~

~~**RESERVED BOOKS.** Any book may be reserved on payment of one penny to cover expenses. See Rule 21.~~

~~TIME ALLOWED FOR READING.~~

~~This book is issued for 15 days and must be returned on or before the date last stamped on the date label. If kept beyond that date borrowers are liable to a fine of 1d per week or portion of a week and cost of notices.~~

5728

GREENWICH LIBRARIES

GREENWICH LIBRARY

Woolwich Road, S.E.10. Phone: 01-858 6656





METROPOLITAN JOINT FICTION

RESERVE

WIMSTEAD LIBRARY

STREET

ON SE18 1JL

854 1728 or 1759

MJFR

✓
F 5728

DRAKE, H.B.

Children reape

If this book is not returned on or before the last date stamped above a charge will be made in accordance with the Libraries' Regulations. Please quote the book number and last date stamped if you wish to renew the book by post or telephone.

F 5728



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2022 with funding from
Kahle/Austin Foundation

THE CHILDREN REAP

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE SCHOONER CALIFORNIA
CURSED BE THE TREASURE

THE BODLEY HEAD

The Children Reap

BY

H. B. DRAKE

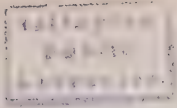
“The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children’s
teeth are set on edge.”



LONDON

JOHN LANE THE BODLEY HEAD LIMITED

PART I



CHAPTER I

GREGORY'S first letter contained little more than an allusion to "that queer fellow Cartwright and his curious kids." The second set me violently speculating. The third. . . .

You can imagine me in placid retirement in my cottage-villa on the downs, with June still young in the air, the valleys a golden flood of buttercups, the smooth, green slopes of the hills dappled darkly with scattered spinneys and aflame with broom, and overhead great, woolly clouds moving slowly through a heaven of beatific sunshine. In fact, England as we dream of her in exile, as we so seldom realize her on our return. And here I read Gregory's letters.

A strange place for such reading. Because he has a certain style with him, Gregory ; or call it genius if you will. Irish blood in him somewhere, I believe. At any rate, his letters have that intimate and arresting quality that at once you are beside him, with his "Why, man !" in your ears, seeing with his eyes, alive with his senses. So, as I read, it was only on glancing up from the paper that I was in England. My spirit was back among the hills and mists of Formosa, plodding behind Gregory as he led me up valleys of steaming rice-fields, lost me in jungles of mammoth ferns and grasses, twisted like an ant among the boles of colossal trees, swung like a monkey along rope-bridges over precipices, plunged

into the blackness of bamboo huts where dusky figures, startingly arrayed, chattered us a gushing welcome. Back, too, on the very stage and among the actors of the drama.

I had but to close my eyes to see again that cup-like hollow in the hills, with its bottom of mud ringed forbiddingly in with rock ; and Patala, "incurable old head-hunter," with his bearded face and tattooed forehead, a shadowy outline squatting, sullen and taciturn, in the darkness of his windowless hut, and the frog-like Lobu with his fixed, wide smile, and the Princess Peepee. For Gregory had taken me to their country, with a pocket stuffed with beads and trinkets for the Princess. Patala was the prime plum of his barbarian acquaintances, and he displayed him to me with a certain conscious flourish. But unfortunately the old ruffian spotted my camera, and promptly dismissed us with superb indignation. Gregory was more hurt than he cared to say.

"Not your fault," he cut into my apologies. "I ought to have warned you. He's not open to inspection. Shy as a hermit crab. You can't get him into the light. The Japs snapped him once, and they still sell his picture—I'll let you have one—but they won't get him again. And, hang it, he's entitled to his pride like the rest of us. I resent myself being lined up to have my deformities immortalized. And to feel yourself regarded as a kind of curio ! Good land, man, wouldn't any jury of Christians bring in a verdict of justifiable homicide ?"

And all this was a background of memory to

Gregory's letters, but vague, detached, because it wasn't Gregory that I was really following, but Cartwright and the curious kids. But Gregory had given me a great holiday, and in the light of it I could understand the story his letters revealed.

Cartwright and Spender.

It was natural that my memory should turn back to them after Gregory's second letter, if not after his first. Any old-timer from the East will have yarns of them. Yet they didn't belong specifically to the East. I suppose they were as familiar in Cape Town as in Tokyo ; but I don't know about that. At any rate they couldn't have been more welcome anywhere than in Tokyo. Their sudden cometary intrusions and disappearances sent a pleasing quiver through our star-like fixity. We petted them and fêted them, and wished them the Devil's own luck as they flung off again into the blue.

We knew nothing of them except that they were rattling good company, and were out for gold ; a couple of buccaneers born a century after their time, " anachronisms come to life," Gregory called them, but none the less delightful for that. They were so intensely alive, shaking us from our torpor like a wind among dead leaves. If they didn't revive us, at least they stirred us to a momentary crackling. For what were we out East for, most of us ? Money, quite obviously.

" But don't you see," Gregory would say, " they don't want money, they want gold. All the difference in the world, man. And if you want to make them miserable tell them where to find it." Well, if we had known. . . .

They were well assorted in their diversity. Spender seemed a roughish sort of fellow till you happened to touch him on a soft spot, then you found him all nerves. A big, swarthy chap who made you speculate on gipsy blood. Thick, wavy hair, unpleasantly long over the ears and at the neck, rather greasy too ; in any other man you would have found it offensive, but you forgave Spender, just as you forgive a campaigning soldier a certain muddiness of boots and roughness of chin. Dark eyes with a flash in them. Lips full and red, like a woman's, lending themselves easily to laughter. A touch of roguishness, you might have thought, had it not been dominated by a certain mastery and pride. Altogether a face rich in tone, luxurious in line, not without poetry.

Cartwright was slighter, more aristocratic, always sprucely dressed. "Spender has blood," to quote Gregory again, "but Cartwright has breeding." A rather long face, delicately tinted beneath a transparent skin, blue-grey eyes, a fringe of fair hair over a high forehead, a smallish mouth, the whole face tapering triangularly down to the chin. Something hard about it, a kind of deliberate control as though always conscious of himself. With nothing of Spender's animal fullness of life about him, but with an electric, spiritual alertness that vibrated to a touch. He delighted in an anecdote, in an epigram, yet with his boyishness not altogether shed. He smiled with an even glitter of teeth, restrainedly but enchantingly. He talked with an easy brilliance, as though deliberately delighting in neat, rapid speech just as a swimmer delights in neat, rapid

motion. All this would have been abominably unpleasant if there had been the least suggestion of superiority in it. The curious thing about Cartwright was that, though continually aware of himself, he was never guilty of assumption or display. It was as though he was obliging himself to be natural. At any rate we liked him.

They were anachronisms in more than their buccaneering. Their sentimentality might have come clean from a mediaeval romance. Their glorification of friendship, I mean. Mediaeval love has been handed down to us like an heirloom, but mediaeval friendship has somehow been squandered on the way. Look up your Chaucer and prove it. Yet these two had it, an intense and vital loyalty to one another, like a spiritual transfiguring of their absurd vagabondage. And to some extent one could see how it functioned. Spender's friendship enveloped Cartwright like a paternal protectorship, and Cartwright responded with the passionate admiration of the intellectual for the powerful. Not that Cartwright had anything of the weakling in him. His strenuous wanderings proved him hard as steel. But the psychological law worked nevertheless. The strain on his courage and endurance must have been far more telling with him than with Spender. One thought of Spender shouldering hardship with a laugh, and drinking danger like a wine ; but to Cartwright, consciously screwing himself up to the pitch of each occasion, his friend's brute simplicity of courage must have appealed with the power of an elemental emotion. All quite clear ; so clear that we speculated on what would

happen when they dissolved partnership. That sort of thing couldn't keep up for ever. If nothing else, some woman would wedge in between. Yet the mere suggestion of their separating was enough to show us how impossible it was to think of one without the other.

Then we heard that Spender was dead.

For a day, perhaps, the world showed a shade darker. No more dashing and illuminating inroads, ravishing us from captivity into an impossible free world of buoyant romance and sentimental glamour. "Poor old Cartwright!" we said, entirely unable to envisage him in a universe without Spender. And such blurred picture of him as we could summon was rather painful too; we preferred not to contemplate it. After all, he didn't belong to us. Gregory showed the most emotion.

"My heart bleeds for the fellow, man!" he told me, clenching his teeth. "Things sometimes happen in this old world that a Christian can't understand."

Perhaps I was more curious than the rest, having the writer's *flair* for a story, but unscrupulous as most of our brood are I hadn't the impertinence to hunt Cartwright down for the sake of possible "copy." And the others were satisfied, for the most part, with the mere news. In any case details weren't forthcoming. It seemed that Cartwright had returned to England—some said wealthy—but no one knew where or how Spender had been killed.

Later the rumour filtered through that Cartwright had married. Well, a fellow like that couldn't live alone. We felt a certain comfort on his account.

Time and a wife would help him to forget. Then we heard that his wife had died giving birth to a child—a daughter—her name was Laura. The news came piecemeal. We proceeded to forget him again, when it came through that he had adopted Spender's son. That set us talking about the pair of them once more. We reminded each other of the great times we had had with them, the yarns and the drinking and the fun. And so old Spender had had a kid? We had never imagined him married. Probably wasn't, it was suggested. We were bound to agree, though we said, "Shame!" And the mother was Cartwright's sister, was the next information. Well, that seemed right and fitting. She had recently died—slowly pined away, we told one another—and Cartwright had taken the kid over—his name was Stephen. Then, again, silence.

The next we knew was that Cartwright was among us—with the kids. But we hardly recognized him. It was pitiful. He was an old man, completely broken down. We held a reception for him, of course; but it was an agony. One blundering fool—I spare the name—shook him absently by the hand and said, "How do, old man? But where's Cartwright?" and went wandering off to look for him. And, remember, he was as sensitive as a snail's horn. He knew he was giving us pain, and shrank from us. He wasn't in when we called on him. We left our cards, immensely relieved, because we felt uneasy talking to him with the golden past fretting at our memories.

Gregory, of course, made contact; and I pushed

myself in unbidden. He opened to us a little. It was true that he and Spender had found gold ; he preferred not to say where. It had cost Spender his life ; he preferred not to say how. But it had broken him, he told us. And of course, he ought to have died too. To outlive Spender——.

I tried clumsily to protest. Gregory knew better how to handle the fellow.

“ Why, man alive ! ” he exclaimed, “ you can’t go dragging along all your days with a thing like that round your neck ! Death’s not a thing to tamper with. I don’t pretend to understand it ; but all the more reason to let it alone. And you’ve got these kids——.”

But Cartwright was suffering from the fixed idea : he had been disloyal ; he ought to have died with his friend.

“ If I had gone,” he asked, “ do you think Spender would be alive now ? ”

“ Then good land, man ! ” Gregory cried, “ I’ll get you a revolver and hold your hand while you put a bullet through your head. If death’ll atone, the sooner the better.”

Cartwright smiled a whimsical comprehension, but lapsing into his melancholy said :

“ Too late now, old chap. There’s the boy to make it up to. A bullet through the head would be a second disloyalty.”

“ Then what the blazes is the trouble ? ” Gregory exclaimed. “ If there’s the boy now there always was the boy, wasn’t there ? ”

“ But I didn’t know it,” Cartwright said. “ At the time he wasn’t even born.”

Gregory became excited. "You didn't know? But what the hell, man—you make a Christian swear!—isn't there a Providence?"

"Quite," said Cartwright, in something of his old neat way, "but his name is Fate."

"You make me sick," Gregory exclaimed disgustedly, and was immediately all gentleness. "Come, man, you've been hit pretty hard. We don't want to poke our noses in where they're not wanted, but sometimes it helps a fellow to unbreast. Here's a couple of us prepared for a night of it if need be. Just get talking. Do you a world of good. We won't ask questions; and we won't blab."

Then Cartwright opened out. A stream of it. But he didn't tell us anything; details, I mean. He harped on his disloyalty. But perhaps he could make up for that. The boy. His daughter too. They might come to marry. He would never marry again himself; he owed that to his wife. But his hope now was in the children. He would give them the best he could. Show them the world. After all, he had seen a good slice of it. And the children had spirit. Weren't born for stay-at-homes. Got to quarrelling when they weren't on the move and that hurts more than anything. Splendid youngsters, though. That's where his hope lay now. Seemed to give a chap a second chance. And so forth. I didn't know whether it was pathetic or simply silly. But coming away I remember how Gregory kept exclaiming:

"He's incorrigible, incorrigible! A fellow can't go about blubbering like that. Let's hope the children will save him. Because he's worth saving."

Too sensitive for this rough old world, that's about the truth of it. And to think of what he was ! Why, now—a mere husk, a shell of a man ! ”

All this came back to me, among the clean beauty of the downs, under a gentle English sky. It had happened in Tokyo, though Gregory wrote now from Formosa. The earthquake had smashed Gregory—his face, poor old chap, as well as his fortune. Cartwright, loyal to his friends, had sent generous aid from the other side of the world, “in memory of Spender.” He was able to set some of them on their feet again, but Gregory said it was too late for him to begin afresh. After all, wasn't this also Providence, though things happened in this topsy-turvy world which a Christian couldn't always understand ? Tokyo became unbearable to him, and he established himself in Taihoku, teaching English in a Government school. But in a couple of years he had covered the best part of the island. He came to love it ; its preposterous hills, its complicated peoples, even its wallowing buffaloes. And the people came to love him too. Witness Lobu's eulogies, which, hearing them from his own mouth, I have been able to insert into the gaps which Gregory's modesty left vacant. Well, I spent a memorable three weeks with him in Formosa, as I have told you. And now it was there that he met Cartwright once again.

But first let me tell you something of the kids.

CHAPTER II

I NEVER got to know them very well. I only saw them three times. And in any case it's difficult to make contact with children, unless you're a sentimental genius like Gregory with a particularly tender spot for waifs and derelicts. Because I'm sure it was the peculiar pathos of their situation rather than the children themselves that caught first at Gregory's compassion. Yet I don't know ; he abounded with an unappeased maternity. It was a standing joke with us that he had never married because he was at soul a woman. At any rate he was almost immediately thick with Cartwright's kids, with diminutive Japanese dolls for Laura, and gaudy Japanese prints for Stephen ; so thick that he continued to have innumerable letters from them long after they had gone, from the boy in particular, from all parts of the world. He took Cartwright to task for dragging them round with him, and I don't doubt he wrote to him about it too. "Let them take root," he would protest. "Put the boy to a good school ; ground him in healthy traditions. You know yourself that all this gallivanting only unsettles a fellow. You must begin with the foundations. . . . Why, man alive ! If only to save him from the everlasting contemplation of your own morbid face you should pack him off to school. He needs boys, not moods and memories.

You'll make him sick, always dosing him with your sour old conscience." Cartwright had one reply : " Do you think Spender would want him to rust at school ? " For the girl, Gregory wasn't quite so certain. " It'll be her job, poor little thing," he used to say to me, " to take care of that man, and she may as well be brought up to it. It's damnable to think of, but woman's lot. The ways of the Almighty leave an honest fellow guessing. Still, she needs England the same as the boy." Well, out East, England has a glamour. But Gregory's protests had no effect. Cartwright continued to hale the children in his wake in his forlorn wanderings about a disillusioned world.

Stephen and Laura wouldn't have impressed me much if I had only seen them that first time. Laura was a little blue-and-gold doll-like thing of five ; Stephen was seven, but still too young to show any particular individuality. Gregory gushed about them ; he would. He tried to enthuse me with Laura's great solemn eyes. Just look at them, man ! But all children have great solemn eyes. So have owls. Only some people call them saucers. And Stephen—why, man, a second Raphael ! Well, possibly the boy showed a certain precocity with the pencil. But was there a child yet who wasn't an incipient genius ?

They returned to Tokyo some five years later. Meanwhile I had had Stephen's letters to Gregory—Cartwright's also—forced upon me, and I had felt a growing interest in the curious life of those two children, whisked on a magic carpet through a fairy world, yet under the constant shadow of Cartwright's

morbid obsession. "Thank God for the nurse!" Gregory used to exclaim. I hadn't noticed the nurse particularly. She had seemed ordinary enough. But Gregory declared she carried England about with her. I think he meant a pair of ready hands for offending ears. Also a powerful and reproving tongue. "Lends a sane streak of discipline to the imbecile muddle," was his way of putting it. But the letters, and more still Gregory's unceasing disquisitions, had kept me imaginatively in touch with the youngsters.

Laura's "great solemn eyes" (saucers) had a premature gravity in them. She was a soft-spoken child. She moved with a quiet deliberation. You might be in a room five minutes without being aware of her, squatting on the floor in a corner, half hidden behind a great book. When you caught her eye she would smile widely, flushing a little, and bury her face in her book again. But if her father were present she would watch him with a curiously maternal anxiety. Particularly if he got talking in his weak, querulous way, when she would come and stand against him, fingering his white hair. With Stephen she had something of the same quiet subservience, playing little sister to his big brother with an admiring devotion. But she wasn't putty. I mean, if you trod on her she didn't squash. And when you got her away from the house—at sea, or hiking over the hills—the healthy animal in her awoke. Her eyes sparkled, her face glowed, her whole body seemed to exhale a radiant and primal energy as though instinct with the vigour of the sun and the air.

Stephen had filled out more than he had given promise to. He wasn't robust like his father ; I should say he took more after the Cartwrights. But a life of perpetual out-of-doors, however unsettling to his morals, had built him and braced him into a fit and vigorous physique. He certainly was artistic, though even more so in feeling than in execution. He had an expressive face ; dark like his father's, but not with the same uncouth poetry in it. His uncle had constrained him to his own standard of neatness, the boy's artistic nature, I should say, responding easily to the demand. He didn't occupy himself much with books. He left that to Laura, while, curiously enough, she left it to him to make the clothes for her dolls. Not having mixed with boys he had never learnt how shameful that was. Then, too, he loved making things ; and in the East he had abundant material to test his accuracy of eye and deftness of finger. During this second stay in Tokyo he was busy working on the model of a Chinese temple. But more of that later. It led to an incident which illuminated for us suddenly certain passages in his letters, and Cartwright's weary complaint that if the children weren't on the move they got to quarrelling. But this isn't quite the place to tell you of that.

There was something that had struck deeper root in Stephen's spirit than his pictures and models. Really to get him talking you had to mention his father. He was thirsty for details of him. He carried his photograph about, and in confidential moments would draw it out and show it to you. "This is my father," he would say. "My mother

gave it to me. He's dead now, but he was the greatest man in the world." And sometimes he would speak of his mother, though he must have been too young when she died really to remember her. "She used to look at me," he would say, when you questioned him about her. "She used to talk to me." There was something in his voice, in his manner, a little strained, startling, unnatural. But you remembered that he had never been to school. He had learnt to think from his uncle. So much so that he would set you in a burst of laughter by coming out unexpectedly with one of Cartwright's moral maxims, quite simply, as though speaking his own thought. For instance, I distinctly remember him taking Gregory to task for his untidiness : "Trim in body, trim in mind," he said. "Your conscience first gets out at heels with your boots." This from a boy of twelve, just as another boy would have said, "Pull your socks up." Sometimes you wondered whether those children were still five years old, or were already a hundred, and you were left speculating how the world was registering itself on their imaginations. Stephen's sketch-book gave you something of the visible impression ; but the spiritual ? What sort of delusions were they being cajoled into ? What fabulous and fantastic network of dreams ?

"Just consider that boy," Gregory would say. "It doesn't matter so much with the girl. A girl has a natural poise. The Almighty saw to that ; one of his triumphs. But a boy needs ballast ; and what does old Cartwright do but blow the little fellow full of wind ? Endless mournful stuff. I

tell you, man, it's a crime. And at night too, poisoning the little chap's sleep. Always droning on the same theme : ' When your father was alive—Palamon and Arcite, son. There never were such friends. But something's happened to the sunlight since he died.' A curious thin sentimental talk but with just enough sting in it to give an unhealthy quirk to the boy's pulse. No wonder the kids get quarrelling."

In fact " the kids " came to assume the centre of the picture. Cartwright was so obviously done with. He was no longer a man ; he was a mood, an obsession. We thought of him as Stephen's uncle. Because the news came from Stephen. Laura was important too, but it was Stephen who did the talking and the writing. Childish stuff, of course, and without Gregory's illuminating interpretation not of vast moment. But Stephen must have talked to Gregory in a way in which he didn't talk to us ; or else Gregory had amazing dreams. But little by little he drew such a convincing picture for us of the life of those two children that the thing might have happened before our eyes like a play. Thinking of it, of course, it's absurd. How could Stephen have reported his uncle's monologues word for word ? How could Gregory have remembered them ? But what did that matter ? The spirit of the thing was there. It was truer than truth.

That is how I am able to tell you of these people. I met them once again, a mere touch in passing, some five years later still. I didn't learn much, except that they were still wandering. But it was enough to show me them on the threshold of manhood and

womanhood so that I could envisage them as I read Gregory's letters. And then with those letters the picture was complete. They contained abundant new material, because Stephen must have opened out to Gregory in Formosa as he had never done before, though Laura, as always, added little. Not merely silent, mind you. Laura was one of those people who enhance a conversation by listening. Put her contribution at the minimum, she could hold Stephen to the truth. But the story essentially comes from the boy, and if I'm to give it to you at all it must be with Stephen in the centre.

CHAPTER III

CARTWRIGHT'S hair was already white at thirty. Stephen was a boy of five then, newly established in his house, and he accepted his uncle's white hair without questioning, just as he accepted everything that came to him with his changed life : the nurse, prim, kindly, and vexatious, the palatial nursery with its great oak cupboard crammed with toys, his cousin Laura feeding opposite him in her high chair, fixing him with great blue eyes as she solemnly emptied her milk down her bib, and later their life of wanderings, without aim, without end, undertaken at a caprice, abandoned at a whim, " simply because," as nurse used to declare tartly, " that man's got the fidgets in his heart and can't sit still." But then nurse had the packing to do, and the care of a couple of children on her mind in difficult climates and on rough seas. But for Stephen and his cousin life became a moving pageantry of ships and chairs and rickshas, of dark-skinned peoples, clothed brilliantly, clothed scantily, with heavy necklaces of shells and teeth and beads and jade and amber, with fuzzy hair and queues and great black coils shot through with coral pins, a motley folk chattering in strange gutturals, proffering curious wares, squatting on mats by the doors of bamboo huts, peering intently through lattices and shutters, ambling lazily down crooked and gaudy

streets, and all set against a jumbled background of smoking mountains, palms and pines, black cliffs and yellow rivers, scarlet sunsets and blue seas.

Nurse might fume as she would, but Stephen made no protest at their constant uprootings. He had only made one protest in his life that he could remember. That was when he saw them lower his mother into the earth. He had endured it all until that moment, thinking it some solemn kind of game : the drawn blinds, the black clothes, his mother fast asleep in her funny new bed ; the slow procession of carriages with his mother in front in her royal coach of glass, the flowers and the candles and the singing, as though everything were in expectation of the coming of the fairy prince who would waken her with a kiss. Even the churchyard with its stern white tombs didn't distress him. But he always remembered starting back in horror from the great gaping wound in the ground with the yellow clay thrown up about it soiling the green grass. As he stood on the muddy board looking down a chill damp air seemed to rise about him. And then they began to lower his mother into that horrible hole they had made. He let out a scream of protest. "She won't be comfy," he declared, "in that horrid wooden box." He was hushed and petted, which made him bawl the louder. Then he found himself in his new home with every conceivable kind of toy to play with, and his uncle full of games and stories, and his nurse clumsily affectionate and reasonably seducible, and all these other things began to happen to him. But at times, in the middle of play, it might be, or deep in a marvellous picture book, or

gazing at the setting sun across some superb expanse of sea, the memory of his mother's burial would come over him, stifling him with a sudden sense of constriction. Then he would become moody for days together, and would scold Laura at every turn to cover up his shameful impulse to tears.

Child as he was at his mother's death she had stamped an impression on him deeper than memory. Details eluded him, groping back for her through the shadows, but the vision remained, a vision vague like a nimbus about a pair of steady and constraining eyes. They drew him, they held him. He had but to close his own to see them still, intently fixed on him as he fell asleep at night, as he awoke in the morning, with a wildness, with a pity, that mastered him like a spell. His mother must have spoken to him too about his father, because when his uncle began to talk of him old memories seemed to stir within him, teasing him with elusive waifs of recollection. He would listen earnestly, but straining as it were for the tones of another voice, as you wait for an echo from the distance. "My best friend, Steve lad ; my only friend," his uncle used to say, fixing him full with his clouded eyes. "Beat the globe through, you won't find another to touch him. Blue blood ; heart of gold. Yes, old chap, lay that by to chew on in dark moments : heart of gold." And so forth, till the strain of his uncle's growing emotion seemed to grip at the boy's spirit in a way that took him back to earlier days when surely his mother had also talked so. He could see her gaze in his uncle's

gaze, but what she had said he could never remember. Yet, looking back on it, he distinctly recalled a feeling of resentment against his uncle whenever he spoke of his father. There was something about the man that, as a child, alarmed him, and, as a boy, repelled him, and he couldn't couple him in his mind with the heroic figure of his father which he had built up in his imagination. Then there was always something too which his mother had impressed on him, something rebuking and reproachful, which kept him uneasily averse to his uncle, setting a shadow between them which all the man's kindness could never quite dispel.

Yet Cartwright might have been a great companion for a boy. He had always been a wanderer. He could reel off the most thrilling yarns. Trotting in his wake Stephen must have seen half the world, and for each new place they came to Cartwright had stories and reminiscences to enhance the glamour of a life already unwarrantably romantic. But it was clear to the boy that his uncle drew little comfort from it all. Nurse said he had the fidgets in his heart, whatever that might mean ; but judging by her use of the word when applied to Stephen "fidgets" was hardly the term to express his uncle's malady. He used to take the boy into his confidence, sitting on his bed at night hours after he ought to have been asleep, talking in a manner altogether unintelligible. But occasionally something of Cartwright's querulous effusiveness would detach itself from the general incomprehensibility and lodge itself in Stephen's mind. "It's never been the same, boy, since I lost your father," Cart-

wright would say. "There was a friend for you. True blue! Something for you to be proud of when you come to understand it. We had hard times all right; but we kept step. Trouble doesn't matter then. Rough roads and rainy skies—if you've got a friend to pad along beside you—danger too, it's all in the day's work. And we had our bellyful of that, I can tell you; throve on it. . . . Those were great days, great and wonderful days. But it's different when a chap's all alone." That was the kind of thing he treated the child to. And usually at night. Sometimes Stephen would hear him through his dreams, "Are you awake, lad? Are you awake?" He would turn in his bed and mumble something, to become gradually conscious of his uncle muttering softly through the night: "David and Jonathan, old chap; passing the love of women. But it's pretty hard on a fellow when half his life's in the grave." Stephen would open his eyes to see Cartwright's pale face and white hair vaguely luminous against the darkness. He would listen, almost afraid to move, and when at last his uncle rose and tip-toed from the room the boy would lie perfectly still, staring into the night, till the morning began to touch the air with grey.

At first the matter of Cartwright's long talks, except for the references to Spender, was so much wind in the child's ears, but as he became more of a boy he fastened on the anecdotes and let the rest blow past, but later the pity of his uncle's broken life began to grip him. A few years of crowded adventure, and suddenly all was at an end. His

uncle and his father—so he pieced it out—had run away to sea. They had tramped and traded and hunted together. They had sailed up the Amazon for rubies ; they had prospected in Australia for opals, in Tasmania for osmiridium, in Alaska for gold. They had shot elephant, they had shot tiger. They had explored strange rivers, had pushed through untrodden jungles, had visited uncharted islands, had known fever and famine and thirst under tropical skies and on frozen seas. And Cartwright threaded his long lamentations with stories from these wonderful years, stories the more vividly real because the settings were stored in the boy's memory if not actually present to his eyes. Yet where was the profit of it all ? he was Peterkin enough to ask. His uncle was still a young man, with his life before him, but the years stretched out like a desert ahead : “ You see, Steve, when a fellow's all alone the sting's out of the game. The glory and the dream, you know. You get to remembering, and that makes a chap go limp. Some of us flower early, some late. Not much use in a primrose once the spring's by. Yet the primrose gets another chance. But *homo sapiens* is only an annual, you'll find. Another chance ! . . . Ye gods ! . . . See here, Steve lad, you arrange things so that you won't get hankering for that other chance. It doesn't come, any way. . . . If I had my time again. . . . But I can't forget your father. I can't forget.”

Looking at him Stephen knew he spoke the truth. His face had the bloodless pallor of an old man's. Heavy pockets of flesh hung in circles beneath his

eyes. His mouth drooped to a melancholy fixity. His cheeks fell in beneath the cheek-bones as though drawn down to his chin by some physical constraint. Yet the mark on him wasn't the mark of age. When he forgot himself and smiled—during one of their rare games, for instance—the curl of his lips and the glitter of his teeth were strangely frank and boyish. It was astonishing, like a transfiguration, like a sudden break of sunshine through a completely veiled sky. Stephen would examine him intently in a sort of wonder. His brow was smooth, and his hair, though white, showed no signs of falling. His spirit, too, was vigorously alert beneath its apparent apathy. When stirred he immediately caught fire. But he burnt out quickly—a spark and an explosion—as though the strain of a feverish life had wasted his reserve. Perhaps that; or perhaps the despair that had settled on him had choked the source of his vitality. Discussion excited him. His cheeks would take on bright spots of colour. His words would come rapidly and freely, edged with a sharp energy, pointed with epigram. But of a sudden he would fall silent, would relapse into an irresponsive brooding, as though the effort had exhausted him. There was no reckoning on his moods. It was like sailing in squally weather. One had to be alert at a moment's notice to hoist sail to his sudden winds, to heave-to to his tempests. It was a life of everlasting reefing and trimming which left one's nerves harassed and uncertain. For hours he would sit without a word, perched uneasily on the edge of his great chair, always leaning forward with legs

crossed, the swinging foot beating to some irritable mental rhythm, his teeth busy with a cigar—as likely as not extinct—his arms braced back along the arms of the chair, his fingers playing a tattoo, his long pale face shadowing over to this hurrying emotion, his clouded eyes set intently on vacancy. And at any moment he might start from his trance to ask for a match, or to announce the family's immediate departure for Madagascar or Japan. No wonder nurse had “Bless the man and his fooleries!” continually on her lips, and would drop her work in a flurry of consternation whenever he started to speak. No wonder, too, that Stephen, who had never known his uncle in his triumphant days, furtively comparing this derelict of a man with the picture his mother had given him of his magnificent father, should be left perplexed that any bond should ever have held two such men together.

But suppose we come to Laura.

CHAPTER IV

ALMOST from the beginning the cousins were inseparable ; almost from the beginning too they were subject to disastrous quarrels. These blew up out of nothing, suddenly and overwhelmingly, exhausting them as though by a physical wastage. At first nurse tried to settle them by valiance of chastisement. While the cousins were mere children she could separate them, she could shout them down, she could crush the more violent manifestations of their hostilities, but later she had to admit to defeat. "The young devils," she would appeal to Cartwright hurrying in at the alarm, "they're ready to murder a body." And certainly they were ready to murder her if she interfered, but they seldom laid hands on each other. The feud between them was deeper than that. They wanted to hurt to the heart. They hungered to deal some deadly and irremediable wound, possessed utterly by a passion of hate. For days the battle would rage, consuming them like a fever, while Cartwright with tears in his eyes would appeal to them to be reconciled, squatting on his haunches between them while they glared savagely across at one another over his head, or marching them away for tramps in the country, yarning to them as he gripped them one in either hand, or expatiating on the beauties of the good world. And eventually their anger

would abate, or rather would fall away from them like something alien and incomprehensible, leaving them astonished and subdued. Then for a little they would be timidly gentle with each other, to return by degrees to a more boisterous companionship.

Neither of them could remember the occasions of their quarrels, though the results, Stephen told Gregory, remained in his memory with something of the shattering echo of an explosion which startles you from a dream. I can well understand it. I have already mentioned the model of a Chinese temple on which Stephen was busy during the family's second stay in Tokyo. He had brought some pictures of the thing from China, and set to work soon after his arrival. We all thought it was too difficult for him, but Gregory put himself to endless pains hunting out colours and materials, and selecting and interpreting the mottoes to be emblazoned on the panels and lintels. Laura too helped with devoted patience, sharpening knives, cleaning brushes, or merely standing silently by while he worked, stimulating him with her admiration. It grew into a long affair ; and I believe there was a considerable prize at stake, though apart from the glory of winning it the prize itself meant little. The boy's whole soul had gone into the thing. It was a mass of moulding and carving and colour : dragons encircling the columns, little twisted fish on the uplifted points of the gables, a network of rafters supporting the curved ribbed roof with each projecting end individually ornamented. You can imagine that. Measured in mere time it was a

six months' labour. And seeing it slowly take form and beauty Laura became as excited as Stephen himself, as proud of it too, constituting herself caretaker, and displaying it to admiring friends with reiterated warnings not to touch. Then one day they quarrelled. Gregory and I happened to be present at the time, but neither of us can recall what precipitated the affair. Immediately they were all fire, and without a moment's hesitation Laura brought her fists down on the work smashing it to pieces.

I must admit to a shock of horror. And Laura showed no contrition, so evidently glorying in Stephen's pain. We never did see her show contrition. Cartwright got them on the move again, travel being his one panacea for such disputes. But we could understand now what he meant when he complained of their quarrels. We could understand too the occasional references in Stephen's letters : "I'm not talking to Laura just now. I'm hating her." But it wasn't always Laura who was guilty. Some years later, for instance, we heard of a similar incident when Stephen ruined an evening frock for his cousin. A birthday frock which he had himself helped her to design, a real fairy creation, he wrote, in which she looked queenly and adorable. She would have reigned supreme that evening, and Stephen was anticipating her triumph with the pride of proprietorship. They were actually waiting for their friends to arrive when they fell out over some trifle, and Stephen deliberately emptied a bottle of ink over Laura's frock. She had to change immediately into some tawdry thing which showed

pitiably common against her companions' gay dresses, and Stephen revelled in her chagrin.

I needn't multiply examples. The wonder was that they were really so fond of each other. Cartwright once tried to cure them by separation, sending Stephen to boarding school for a while. The cure was complete while the treatment lasted. Apart from one another they moped and pined, yet once together again sooner or later the inevitable happened. And it seemed impossible to stand against it. As they grew into their teens they faced the thing frankly. They admitted their feelings to each other. At times a mastering desire possessed them to inflict some horrible hurt, a hurt which would go to the soul, which would endure and rankle. And at such times it was like a hunger upon them to watch the other in pain. Yet through it all there was a saving pity. They suffered with each other, which sharpened the sting of their malice but which also deepened the contentment of their reconciliation. Yet neither of them was naturally spiteful. People used to say of Stephen, "What a sweet child!" and Laura was too sedately grave to be malignant. In the long periods between quarrels they were absurdly devoted to one another. Without being a tomboy Laura was a great companion. She had never known her mother, had no sisters, and had grown up to comradeship with Stephen as long as she could remember. She knew how to play second fiddle with a self-respecting submission to the demands of harmony. She allowed her cousin a margin of domination sufficient to flatter his masculinity, but not enough to endanger

her individuality. She never flaunted her price, but Stephen was never in doubt as to her worth. Quite young, too, the boy became conscious of her beauty. Perhaps because, having a certain talent with the pencil and brush, and finding her a patient model, he had early become deeply studied in her charms. At any rate there were frequent daubs of her in his sketch-book, always full face, with vermilion lips, china-blue eyes, and harvest-coloured hair; exaggerated in tone, but true enough in the main. A face that might express indignation, pity, but not a rancorous resentment. And that was the anomaly. If you made a list of Laura's revenges you would imagine her haunting her cousin with a watchful and intrepid malignancy.

Once Stephen simply turned and fled. What had he done? He could never remember. But he remembered how she stepped up to him and said, "That's what one might expect from a penniless bastard." He didn't know what a bastard was, but he repudiated the term with vigour nevertheless. The truth came out in the course of the quarrel that followed. Laura began to hit at Stephen through his father, knowing how her cousin worshipped his memory. He had run off without marrying Stephen's mother, Laura said. That made Stephen laugh. "Why, you silly girl," he exclaimed, "if he hadn't married my mother how could I have been born?" Laura reddened, but didn't answer. Stephen pressed his victory, but she turned from him, girl-like, repeating "Penniless bastard!" Stephen had disposed of "bastard," but "penniless" stuck. He suddenly saw himself

as a charity waif dependent on his uncle. He ran away.

He was found again, of course, and Cartwright mediated between the combatants. When he heard of the cause of Stephen's flight he broke into one of his rare laughs. "Penniless!" he exclaimed. "Why, there's a fortune waiting for you in the bank, lad. You'll never need to starve." But Stephen was difficult to convince. Then Cartwright told him of the last venture he and Spender had made together: "I can't give you details yet, boy. Too painful. Some day later perhaps. You needn't know where we went either. All in good time and I'll take you there. All in good time. . . . But we found all the gold we needed. It was getting clear that we came in for trouble. . . . One of those dizzy mountain tracks. . . . And savages behind us. . . . Your father was killed, boy. I couldn't save him. I ought to have died with him. But I got away. I got away with the gold. His share too. Kept it in trust for you. . . . It's heavy stuff, gold. . . . But your mother wouldn't touch it. She didn't understand. She never forgave me." He passed his hand over the boy's hair, smiling sadly at him: "But you'll forgive me—like a man. Like a man, eh? Like your father's son, eh? I couldn't bring the dead back, but I brought back the gold." Stephen broke down at the sight of his uncle's suffering, and forgave him with all his heart. Cartwright patted him affectionately on the shoulder: "There, there! Tears aren't for men. . . . But don't quarrel. And you, Laura," he spoke to his daughter more sternly, "keep a check on that

tongue of yours. Keep your ears stopped when silly women get talking." They passed a sentimental hour together. It was a relief to the children when Cartwright exclaimed more jovially, "Why, you're man and wife, you know. Man and wife mustn't quarrel. Besides, you have a heritage, remember. Gold won't do much for you. But you've come into a fortune of friendship, you two, and don't you forget it." He packed them off to their games.

After that he had a greater power over the children. They were afraid to hurt him; though, for Stephen, the knowledge that his mother had never forgiven his uncle left an unpleasant taste. The result was that the quarrels became less frequent, but when the storms did come they were more terrible than ever. Cartwright would plead in a way that struck Stephen as unfairly feminine. "You're killing me between you," he would declare, passing an uncertain hand over his brow. "I want you to be happy, boy. It's a sacred charge. We were such friends. But this—I can hear your father cursing me from the grave." Stephen wasn't as affected as you might suppose. Cartwright's emotion was too exaggerated. There was a sentimental pathos in it that repelled the boy. "Only a memory now," Cartwright would say. "But there's an obligation. You can never shake off the past. And that last hour, Steve lad. My life stopped there. I woke up, and my hair was white. Turned white in a night, as they say. A single step, and I was an old man. . . . You see. . . . If you quarrel. . . . You've been committed to me. You're a job I daren't bungle. Come now, you wouldn't

have your father turn against me in the grave ? ”

Stephen was torn between pity and resentment ; but repetition cannot fail entirely to impress. The children would discuss the matter. It was clear that every shock left Cartwright so much the more wasted. But they didn't quarrel by set design. Their whole wish was to be in accord. Their incomprehensible dissensions baffled and perturbed them till they came to feel a shadow over them as of something monstrous and menacing, following them furtively, ready at a moment to leap.

CHAPTER V

ALWAYS on the move, they picked up education as an express sucks up water. They were at schools here and there, in Honolulu, in Buenos Ayres, in Chefoo. They had tutors the world over, ephemeral creatures who waded with them haphazard into the swamp of learning. But what did it matter? They could prattle in half a dozen languages and stammer in a dozen more. They didn't need to learn the geography-book definitions of torrid and frigid, stratus and cumulus, sirocco and pampero and monsoon. Better still they had become tempered and hardened by their continual wanderings to endure all changes and conditions. Perhaps this was Cartwright's aim, in spite of nurse's fretfulness at his "trapesing a couple of Christian children among the heathen because he's got an itch in his feet." At any rate, when Stephen was about seventeen, and Laura something over fifteen, Cartwright declared one day that the real business was to begin. "Couldn't risk it before," he told them, "but I reckon you can weather it now." His new fad was that they should set out on a systematic revisiting of all the places that he had adventured in with Stephen's father. Need I say that Stephen leaped at the prospect? Nurse without a word of useless protest left tight-lipped

for the basement to haul out the trunks and port-manteaux. But, by the way, she was no longer "nurse"—though she remained with the family still, a useful travelling companion for Laura—having been rechristened by Cartwright, for obvious reasons, Martha.

It must have been near the beginning of this journey that I met them for the third time, I had found a market at last for stories of almond-eyed damsels and cherry-blossom and willows and moon-light, so being no longer under the necessity of selling gasoline in Tokyo I was returning to settle in England. I was waiting for the train at Manchouli when I met them coming east. We sat at a table in the buffet, half hidden from each other by the bole of a huge potted palm, and talked of this and that while the Chinese waiter replenished our glasses with beer. The morning was only two hours old, and, except for Stephen, none of us were feeling particularly communicative. Martha was frankly asleep in a corner. Cartwright was in a fume about certain confiscations at the customs : " This poisonous new brood of Bolshies ! " Besides, he began to count his money, spreading out notes in half a dozen European currencies over the table and attempting to reckon out his losses (" robberies ") on the exchanges. Laura regarded me with a suggestion of suspicion in her " great solemn eyes " (saucers). Annoying, I remember, because, kid as she was, she was the kind of girl that you tend to play up to. She was developing beautifully, saved by a strenuous life from the usual fate of flabbiness that overtakes the girl of fifteen. Looking at her you didn't think

of ribbons and chocolates. You sensed the promise of passion in her, a passion direct, masterful, and exacting. And she would know how to give.

But Stephen held me from too close an observation of Laura by keeping me to a racily spasmodic conversation. Fatigue seemed to loosen his tongue. Perhaps he was overwrought and a little hysterical. His speech came in sudden gusts, at random, between long pauses. It was touched with a certain facile humour, suggestive of a good-natured parody of Cartwright as I had known him in the old days. It was very different from the boy's serious repetitions of his uncle's maxims which I remembered used to flavour his chatter so naïvely as a youngster. Different too from what you might have expected from his letters. His epistolary style was wooden and matter-of-fact. But then the pen is a rare quencher of laughter. Some people grow desperately solemn as soon as they get it adjusted in their fingers as though wielding something awkward like a violin bow. But there was more than a hint of the grown man's easy confidence in Stephen's conversation now : " These Bolshies have properly upset uncle. They have beautiful ideals, of course, but they're hardly gentlemen. After all, why does a man need two suits of clothes—when he never has a bath ? They've relieved us of a lot of useless junk on that principle. Uncle shouted at them, ' What do you want seven thicknesses of skin for ? ' Well, I guess they need a dozen in their trade. What do you think ? " And so forth. I was too sleepy to pay too much attention to it. But through it I was noticing that he had also developed well.

Something bigger than Cartwright ; not powerful, but well-knit. His face already had a mannish set about it. The softness had gone from his cheeks, though it lingered in his lips. I looked for traces of the artist in him ; but apart from a certain depth of eye and responsiveness of feature you would hardly have thought of him as of the artistic type. Something too strong, perhaps. He seemed to have an assurance with him, strangely at odds with a certain sensitive mobility of mouth and untrained manner. Still, a fine lad. I wished him well of his Laura. . . . I have never seen them since. It was three years later when Gregory's letters came.

Three years they were on that journey. It was a marvellous experience, though not all honey, and sufficiently spiced with danger. Blizzards and typhoons don't make for comfort. The Congo and the Amazon are hardly health resorts. Things may happen in a racing schooner among the Pacific islands or in an Arab caravan across the Sahara. And to Stephen it was a wonderful enhancement to it all to be able to say, " My father was here before me," and learn from his uncle of their hardships and adventures. Laura shared his enthusiasm, shared the discomforts of the journey too, refusing to be dumped at some port with Martha while Stephen and her father trekked inland. You can imagine that living in such intimacy the cousins became closer comrades than ever, in spite of an occasional dispute. Cartwright's suggestion of " man and wife," continually reiterated, hypnotized them into regarding themselves as already mated. Even in their dissensions it never occurred to them

that they could be permanently separated. They grew into treating one another as sweethearts without a word spoken. They took their love seriously, vowing and demanding a ruthless fidelity to each other. Their worship was of that kind that cannot tolerate the least blemish in its idol. To hurt each other they had merely to be untrue to their self-set ideals. To show a meanness or a weakness was unpardonable like a betrayal. There may have been something priggish in all this ; something rather too starrily unreal in it too ; born of Laura's reading, isolation, and Cartwright's mediaeval rhapsodies on friendship. I don't know. But there was certainly a fineness in it. At any rate it served them in the place of the discipline which they had neither of them really had at school, keeping them up to the mark in an unsettled life, which, delightful as it was, provided them with no moral standard by which to test their conduct. And Cartwright's contentment was obvious to them. It was as though some inner flame lit up the thin white husk of his face as he watched them with an anxious amiability, squatting about some camp fire, or cramped in the little cuddy of their schooner. He seemed to understand them. He had been an idealist himself. His religion had been friendship. They told each other that he was paying the penalty now in his shattered life for his exaggerated loyalty. He spoke of their journey as a "pilgrimage," and Laura and Stephen thrilled to the word, reading in it the devotion which they felt for each other, till the adventure lost its careless and romantic charm and took on a certain soberness as of an experience sacred and spiritual.

Yet the strain was telling on Cartwright. Not so much the strain of travel, it seemed to the cousins, as of adjusting himself to the double life of the past and the present. It was his constant complaint that everything had changed, yet when he came upon something that had remained unaltered he seemed to be more cruelly moved still. It must have been bitterly harassing to his spirit to submit to such a continuous and relentless fretting of his memory. He bore up while all went smoothly between the cousins, but at the least threat of discord, real or imaginary, he was at once prostrated ; so much so that probably he precipitated a quarrel or two which otherwise might have blown over. In his company the cousins' nerves grew curiously strained. They lost mastery of themselves, became uneasy and uncertain. As far as possible they avoided him, and he showed no chagrin at their neglect. But you can see that, avoid him as they would, in the intimacies of travel it must have been impossible to escape the contagion of his disordered moods. Perhaps it was this which eventually undermined their resistance ; perhaps it was inevitable from the beginning ; but at last their long dissension came to a head.

It happened at Tokyo. But before that they had met Gregory again at Taihoku, and Gregory wrote me his first letter. The letter contained little more than a reference to them. It wasn't until his second letter arrived, written after their return to Formosa from Japan, that he really gave me much news. They had travelled up from the Indies ; had made the trip of the Yang-tse with China already seething ; had barely escaped from the Nanking looting ; had

had their nerves further frayed at Shanghai ; had crossed over in a little Dutch tramp to Formosa, expecting to travel down into the interior. Here Cartwright told the cousins that the pilgrimage was nearly ended. They were all excitement, feeling themselves at the climax of that old Odyssey they had been retracing. Then of course, putting up at the Railway Hotel in Taihoku, they came upon Gregory, already established there, as I have told you, since the earthquake. Cartwright wasn't too frank with Gregory. He told Stephen and Laura also that it would be well to keep dark the exact nature of their journey : " Splendid fellow, Gregory, but he's apt to talk. And remember, where we're going I once found gold. If the Japanese authorities got wind of that it would set their silly little noses sniffing." So Gregory never learnt exactly where they were heading for. But he knew that they would want to see the island, and he put his knowledge at their disposal.

I can see him at it ; I can hear him at it. I was treated to a generous measure of it myself. They sat around the central table in the upper lounge of the hotel, with smokes and whiskey to hand ; though Gregory neither smoked nor drank, but he liked to see other people happy. He brought out his collection of post-cards, pasted on to sheets of foolscap with a patter of humorous and sentimental comment typed down the side. Post-cards mostly of tribal types, crudely coloured and with descriptions in Japanese-English : " Pretty woman of Savage, Formosa "—" Full dressed woman of Barbarian "—" Manners Formosa "—" A charm-

ing Music by Savage pestlas, Taiwan"—and so forth. Most prized of all, some older cards, now suppressed, showing the huts of the head-hunters grimly decorated with skulls. "The Japs won't admit it still goes on," Gregory said. "They say they've got them safely cornered behind electrified wire. But what about the raid of the Bunan folk on the Tayale last year? And they all had fire-arms? And what about Patala—just look at his wicked old face, man!—people still vanish in his country. And the Japanese police lost sixteen heads last year. Yet he's a wise old fellow too."

So he rattled on, enthusing over the wonderful land. "Seven distinct peoples—not merely tribes! That's apart from the Japs and the Chinks. And as for tribes, six hundred and eighty-seven is the latest figure! And in the east there, the cliff drops sheer into the sea five thousand feet like a wall. Why man, the place teems with interest!" Stephen and Laura thrilled to his garrulity, prepared for a dramatic denouement to their long adventure, and Cartwright studying Patala's "wicked old face," said with a certain emotion, "Yes, a man might lose his head in Formosa. . . ."

Yet already Stephen half feared that the end had not really come. Cartwright was obviously on the verge of collapse. He said he must rest a little, which was unusual with him. But during the rest he began to tell Stephen something more of his father's history. Stephen had already learnt at school the meaning of "bastard," and the knowledge had kept him from pressing for information, but now he found that strictly speaking the term

might be applied to him. That is his father and mother had never been legally married. His father had never even heard of his existence. Stephen was a posthumous child. His father had been passionately attached to his mother, promising to marry her as soon as he had won the gold he was scouring the world to hunt. He had set off with Cartwright, buoyant with hope, having heard of gold in Formosa. They had been absurdly lucky. Then suddenly the end came. He had never returned. Cartwright lingered his journey home, broken-hearted, to find when he eventually arrived that his sister had some while since given birth to Stephen. It was a terrible meeting, he told his nephew. His sister never forgave him for coming back alone. . . .

It was a sobering and illuminating story. Stephen understood his uncle better now. He was the keener too to be taken to the scene of the tragedy. Everything seemed to be ready. It was the beginning of April, and Gregory, being on holiday, said he would guide them through the island, though not yet knowing what really underlay the expedition. He could take them off the beaten track. "Perhaps we could risk looking up old Patala," he said, "though he did warn me away last time. Incurrible old brute ! At any rate we could get a peep at his country. The police have got used to my vagabonding. They used to get excited when I got lost, but they've found I always turn up again. But if they dump an escort on you you'll only see what they want to show you. And the weather's just right. Still a little rainy perhaps. But in summer it's impossible. Autumn best, of course,

but I'm tied down to my school then. Luckiest thing in the world you rolled along just now. Why man, I'm just itching to lift the veil for you. . . ." And then Cartwright completely broke down. He took to trembling like a man with the ague. He lost all control of his features, so that his lips twitched and his eyes blinked and his whole countenance took on the most grotesque contortions. "I can't face it, boy," he told Stephen, becoming maudlin like an old man. "Another time. Another time." Stephen and Laura—Gregory too—swallowed their disappointment, and insisted that he should go to Tokyo where he could get medical attendance. Gregory recommended "the very fellow" for him: "Waters, nerve specialist. He'll patch you up, man." But the cousins were both intensely chagrined. Each new stage of the journey had whetted their anticipation of the climax. They retreated to Tokyo with none too good a grace; and there their demon leapt on them, and they quarrelled.

Gregory didn't know of their quarrel yet. He might have told me the rest of the visit in his first letter; but he didn't. He was writing about other things, and only mentioned Cartwright and the cousins. But he let me have it in the second letter. That was three weeks later. Returning to the hotel one evening he found Martha there. He expected to see the other three, but was told that they had started without delay for the interior. There wasn't even a note for Gregory. He felt hurt. Also a little alarmed. Martha told him that they had been ready to start for England when Cartwright

suddenly changed his mind and bundled them all back to Formosa : " He never knows what he wants, that man. He's like a big baby." Stephen and Laura had been behaving "funnilly." Martha felt there was something wrong, but was entirely unable either to analyse her own impressions or to give Gregory any tangible clue : " All this trapesing about in horrid places ; just daft. They'll go mad the lot of them. I'm fair sick of it, I can tell you. But a body can't desert the children." Gregory set about comforting Martha, who had at last found an outlet to her troubles, while his mind was busy questioning the affair. Was there anything he ought to do ? But he was tied to his school-teaching now. Besides, the police kept a mighty wide eye on travellers in Formosa. They wouldn't come to harm. But still. . . .

A fortnight later I received his third letter.

An immense letter. A preposterous letter. During breakfast I refrained from broaching it, but breakfast over I settled myself in a deck-chair in the shelter of a spinney overlooking the downs, put on a pipe, spread the pages out upon my knees—and allowed Gregory to whisk me away from the hedgerows and the buttercups, from the church-towers and the grazing sheep, from the peace and assurance and sanity of England which lay like a benediction over the suave and gracious landscape, to the heat and savagery and madness of the East where men see life intensified and distorted as though through the medium of nightmare.

PART II

CHAPTER VI

SO Stephen and Laura quarrelled.

Stephen was a man now. The old childish revenge of spilling ink on a ball frock would no longer satisfy. But he knew how to punish home. He had Laura at his mercy because of her faith in him, her assurance in his loyalty to their common ideal. He had but to contaminate himself to poison the very spring of her life. It was easily done. He spent a night in the Yoshiware with a hired woman. It was a piece of stupid and cheerless folly, deliberately pursued to its conclusion without even the illusion of delight. The *sake* drinking, the posturing girls, the pathetically decorated harlot—from beginning to end there was nothing in it to stir his pulses. He performed his part grimly like an irksome task. As he left in the early morning the girl followed him to the threshold, bowed to him as to one who had done her a great honour, and invited him politely to return: "*Mata irasshai!*" He was a customer, no more. But it was a nasty trade, and the stain of it was on him, the more irrevocably he felt for his passionless deliberateness. He returned to Laura to tell her what he had done.

They were staying at the *Taizan-Kwan*. He found her already up, with a *kimono* about her, kneeling on a cushion by the *hibachi* fire-bowl, with a little tray of tea beside her and a minute porcelain

box of pickled plums. He set a cushion opposite her and squatted himself down cross-legged, and selected a cigarette from a packet lying on the mats. She picked out a piece of red-hot charcoal with the tongs and held it up to him, carefully returning it to its place in the *hibachi* when he had lit his cigarette, pushed the ash-tray towards him, and poured out a tiny cup of amber tea. All without a word, politely and ceremoniously like a Japanese girl, like the girl who had rented her body to him inviting him with meticulous etiquette to return. If there had been any warmth in her manner he might even then have held his tongue, but her coldness stung him to defiance. He told her how he had spent the night, adding tauntingly, "What one might expect from a penniless bastard, eh?"

She didn't exclaim. She didn't gesticulate. She remained completely still, fixing him with wide blue eyes from a face turned ashen. He knew he had wounded her beyond remedy. He could have prostrated himself before her, grovelling for forgiveness, his pride utterly broken at the sight of her distress. But her stillness paralysed him. There was nothing to do but to watch and wait. He set himself to blowing smoke-rings to assert his unconcern, but his hand trembled. He abandoned the cigarette, pushing it deep among the ashes in the fire-bowl. Gradually something of the colour came back to his cousin's cheeks. He could see she was taking control of her emotion. When she began to speak it was calmly and quietly.

"It was sure to happen at last," she said. "We might have known. It was wrong of us ever to

pretend that we belonged to each other. This shows it. I don't blame you, Stephen. I don't think I blame myself either. It's that other thing. It's followed us all along. There's been something against us, right from the beginning. You know it as well as I do. A shadow. . . . Something. . . . Otherwise you would never have—hurt yourself—like this. It's only been too strong for us because we've been fond of each other. Too fond of each other. The danger lies in our love. You see that, don't you? We must never speak of love again."

He couldn't protest, soiled as he was. Besides, however he might struggle against it, he felt she was speaking the truth. It was so clear that that deed of last night was no real part of him. But perhaps when this had blown over——.

"It will break father's heart," Laura went on. "But we must tell him. We can't go on living this lie. Because in any case you'll have to leave us."

He cried out sharply at that; and she came quickly round to him, caressing him with her hands, comforting him. "Don't you see?" she said, breaking from her restraint, but holding back the tears. "It's got to be. We've stood up to it as well as we could. But it's beaten us. Let's admit it before——. But it's too late already," she cried out in sudden pain. "You've had to pay. But worse may happen. God knows what. Something dreadful. . . . I tell you, Steve, I'm afraid."

He did protest then. He vowed, he argued. He said love was worth any risk, and added paradoxically that, having learnt his lesson, there was

no more risk at all. But they had learnt so many lessons without becoming wiser. There was a fatality in their love. "For your own sake," Laura reiterated, "for your own sake you must go. I insist that you shall go."

"But without you I shall go to the dogs," he declared.

"And with me you'll go to the devil," she retorted.

He yielded to her passionate vehemence, trusting to time to mediate between them, yet with the dreadful fear at his heart that separation was the only remedy. Meanwhile she granted him a certain period of grace. He might remain with her until her father sailed for England, then he was to explain their decision to him, and cut the knot by remaining behind. The prospect was as barren as a desert. It wasn't much comfort to be reminded that he had his paints and brushes, and that Japan was a beautiful place. The only comfort was that he was too cowardly really to believe in the coming separation, though he might have read Laura's resolve in her compassionate concern for him, in her quiet tenderness, in her brooding regard.

And during this time Cartwright had called on Waters and was submitting to some kind of treatment. I don't know much about Waters, though I have seen the fellow. He didn't belong to our set. He was a medical missionary who gave up mission work and started a practice among the Japanese. The foreigners didn't consult him much. I don't think people liked him. Gregory, of course, was sure to nose him out, for his unpopularity if for

nothing else. I haven't anything definite against him. But he was smooth-spoken, conceited, and with such an unruffled assurance in himself that you always wanted to brush him up the wrong way. But he wouldn't brush up. Well, never mind, he doesn't concern us very much. He didn't seem to do Cartwright much good ; at any rate Cartwright showed no definite signs of improvement. He fell into an apathy so complete that he sensed nothing of the calamity that had overtaken Stephen and Laura. Then one day he returned to the inn in a violent agitation. The cousins couldn't quite make out what had happened. He talked indignantly about some psychological treatment to which he had been subjected. "Quack ! Charlatan !" he exclaimed. "The thing's a damned confessional ! Might as well go to a priest ! Dig up a fellow's past when all he wants to do is to forget. A dip in Lethe, that's all I'm in need of. And what does he want with my dreams ? The night's cruel enough without going through it all again in the day." And so forth. It was clear that Waters was some sort of psycho-analyst. "Eyes like gimlets," Cartwright said. "See things that never happened. 'Get to the roots' be damned for a yarn. If he's got any medicine I'll drink it. Must know everything, must he ? Better ask the recording angel then !" Yet strangely enough he submitted for a week or more to "the fellow's insolent scrutiny." Found it "rather amusing really. Suppose what old Gregory thought I needed was a good laugh." He explained, not too coherently, what "the mad-man" was after : "Has the most amazing theories.

Says you must always get to the beginnings of a trouble. Nothing wrong in that, I suppose. But in practice. . . . Cures shell-shock cases by making a chap tell him what happened in his mother's womb. That sort of thing. Lot of humbug, but quite funny—if he limits himself to other people. Talks about facing up to the truth. When once you can endure the truth. . . . Endure the truth. . . .” Laura and Stephen encouraged him to continue the treatment. They visited the “madman” and found him curiously convincing. But then they were a couple of mystics with no sort of grounding in any practical philosophy of life. Waters mesmerised them with his “eyes like gimlets” and wisely explained to them that Cartwright was suffering from some shock in early life. Well, they could have told him that ; and they did inform him just what the shock had been. It shows how completely out of things he was that he had never heard of Cartwright and Spender. He smoothed a sapient chin, said that Cartwright's dreams had led him to expect something of the sort, but declared that the explanation lay deeper still. There was something behind the affair which Cartwright refused to admit to himself. He must be brought to admit it, to admit it with an unreserved conviction ; then there would be hope of his cure. A practical corollary of the motto, “The truth shall make you free.” But it was useless. Cartwright rebelled at last. He stormed in one day to announce that he could stick the fellow no longer ; he had booked their passages to England. “Ah,” said Martha, “then we're going to have a little peace !”

The ship was to sail in a week. Stephen left it to the last day, then made a final appeal to Laura. "It's all nonsense," he told her. "This shadow, as you call it. You're going to spoil our lives for a silly superstition. You can't really believe in it. It's an insult to our reason. We don't belong to the Middle Ages. We know the danger now, and we've only got to take a grip of ourselves. And what do you mean by fatality? It's a word only. Let's admit that we've quarrelled; that I've made a stupid beast of myself. Forgive me, Laura, and let's begin again."

She shook her head sadly. "I've been thinking about it," she said, "and I believe I've come upon the truth. You remember how my father used to talk about heritage?"

"A heritage of friendship!" Stephen exclaimed. "All the more reason——."

"All the less," she interrupted him. "Spiritual kinship may be as dangerous as physical kinship. Spiritually we're brother and sister, Stephen. We can never mate. Let's face the truth."

"The truth," he muttered bitterly, "shall make you free!"

So they told Cartwright of their decision. It was on the morning of their intended departure, while they were waiting for the taxi to take them to the docks. He received the announcement as silently as Laura had received Stephen's announcement of his debauch. For a moment they thought they had killed him. He seemed to wilt like a dying flower where he squatted on the mats. Then he treated them to a ghastly smile, nodding his head stupidly

like a crazy old man. "Very well then," he said at last, "we can put that right. What was it the madman kept saying? Get back to the beginning. Face it. Admit it. Drag the thing out and look at it, then it loses its power. All talk, but still—it's a chance. . . . Look here, you children, if you want to know where it all began; if you think that'll help. . . . You seemed to believe in the fellow, anyway. . . . But we'll go together. Perhaps the madman knows his job after all. . . . Steve lad, run along and cancel our berths, and book the first boat to Formosa."

There was no time to remonstrate. The taxi was purring below. As Stephen passed through the screens he saw Laura settle at her father's side with her arms thrown shelteringly around him, her cheek caressing his cheek. "For you, dear, yes," he heard him mutter. "But not for me. Not for me."

CHAPTER VII

THEY took the night train to Kobe, arriving in the morning and embarking on the "Horai Maru." They sailed at noon, threading for the rest of that day the islands of the Inland Sea. Their nerves were too strained and jangled to allow of pleasant companionship, so they were relieved to escape from themselves and from each other in a quiet contemplation of the fantastic world about them. The water lay level and serene beneath a dome of intense sky. To either side of them, in front of them, behind them, the ten thousand islands closed them about, drawing in and away, confining them to a channel, permitting them a lake-like space of sea, mere rocks crested with a single tortuous pine, or mountains green to the summit, with settlements of fairy houses at their feet, with rice-paddies terracing up the valleys like a giant's stair-way, with boulders making a space of grey amid the greenery or shooting up in naked pinnacles above the topmost trees, and occasionally high up among the cryptomerias the gleam of a temple roof or the dull red horns of a *torii* gate leading to a Shinto shrine. Granite cliffs rose precipitously from the water, or sloped up steeply through a tangle of shrubs and trees, enclosing little sandy bays where sampans harboured. Fishing junks with ribbed sails set scattered the surface of

the sea, rocking violently to the swell of the ship as it sheered them closely, the lean brown men, naked except for a towel knotted round their heads and a white loin-cloth, straining at the oar-rudder to avoid the vessel, and grinning a salute as it passed.

With the evening making a glory of the west a faint haze spread over the water, softening the contours of the mountains, smoothing out the outlines of the rocks, spacing the perspectives of the encircling islands in flat shades of purple and grey. Stephen rose and leant over the rail, absorbing the peace and beauty of it all. Laura came quietly to his side, laying her arm against his, contemplating the sunset with a grave regard. Cartwright began to pace the deck. For a moment he came to the rail, and flinging a hand vaguely out towards the sea exclaimed, "Like a lot of damned animals. Waiting for a fellow. Can't stand it." He stamped away into the saloon, leaving the pair alone. And then Stephen saw what he meant. Laura seemed to see it too, for she pressed more closely against him as though for the assurance of companionship. With the mist and the deepening twilight the islands had taken on strange shapes, lying out on the water like a herd of amphibious creatures, with knotted backs and bulking shoulders, snouted and tailed like saurians. One expected them momentarily to start away in a violent plunging, or vanish under the water like sounding whales. And among them rested the anchored junks, with the last of the light on their ribbed sails, absurdly frail craft to venture into this nest of sleeping monsters who would overwhelm

them like a tornado at the first flurry of their awakening.

Stephen felt troubled by his uncle's distracted manner. Cartwright had seen something here which unnerved him, something which for no nameable reason recalled Laura's broken words: "That other thing. . . . It has followed us all along. . . . We've stood up to it, but it's beaten us. . . . I tell you, I'm afraid. . . ." For a little Stephen also was afraid as though he had been trapped in a world of wild imaginations, of grotesque emotions, swelling up so prodigiously as to dwarf the will to a futile insignificance, the reason to a childish impertinence. And indeed what lay ahead of them? Some unthinkable catastrophe to which this was the lifting veil, this beautiful world given suddenly over to madness. Wasn't that the story of their love? Laura's preposterous decision, for instance, against which he felt as powerless as though one of those islands had indeed turned monster and had fastened him with its claws. . . .

He began to speak: "Look here, Laura——"

She started at his voice. He couldn't remember what he said. But the spell was broken. With the gathering evening the islands had lost their earlier menace, passing by like great shadows, formless in the thickening mist. Lighthouses winked reassuringly, red, white, and green. Occasionally a sea-hawk honked. . . . A fairy peal of bells sounding along the corridors called them in to dinner.

The next morning they made Moji, sailing again a little before noon. Before the day was over they

had left the last of Kyushu behind them, and on all sides was the open sea. The next day they saw no land. The water was as smooth as a dancing-floor. The ship moving through it seemed to be running on rails. The sky was a deep and cloudless blue. Martha installed herself in a deck-chair and dozed over a romance, escaping in sleep and sentiment from the mad reality of this return journey. But for the cousins there was nothing to distract them from brooding on the mystery ahead. They paced the deck. They tried to sleep. They played quoits and deck-golf. They buried their faces in books. It was all useless. And as though to goad them to madness the Japanese would insinuate themselves upon them intent on practising their English : " Ex-cuse my rude-ness. Wheeyer you come from ? Wheeyer you will go ? Why will you go theeyer ? I speak onlee verce leetle Eenglish." The thing became a persecution. They would slide up to them as they leant over the rail, intrude into a conversation, interrupt their reading, grinning at them with unshaved faces and sucking at their tooth-picks, as insistent as mosquitoes—as their own tormenting thoughts. The cousins answered in monosyllables, invented excuses to escape them, rose and avoided them at the least sign of their approach. But they were immune to rudeness, following like a fatality, bland and inevitable. They locked themselves in their cabin and gazed at each other squatting on their beds.

Cartwright kept to himself. There was something in the atmosphere of his loneliness and distress which held the tormentors at bay—which held

Stephen and Laura at bay too. They couldn't bring themselves to approach him. He sat all day on deck staring ahead into the distance where Formosa lay with its secret which was somehow to bring appeasing to the long dissension which was ravaging the love of those two. And they speculated on it, half curious, half alarmed, facing each other seriously in the little cabin, or standing by the rail looking down at the crossing foam-patterns on the water. But they could formulate nothing clearly. That "madman's" theories, Cartwright's brooding—it was all too vague. "It must be something terrible," was all they could say. "Yet how does it concern us? What does he mean to do?" "He means to sacrifice himself for us," Laura gravely declared. "It is his privilege—because he loves us." Stephen could say nothing to that. A certain shame kept him reticent from refuting Laura's exaggerated hypotheses. Yet even so. . . .

The next morning they ran into a grey drizzle. It was towards the end of April now, and the rainy season had not entirely lifted from Formosa. In the afternoon they raised land, a misty obscurity in the rain hardening into a long ridge of rough summits lying across the horizon. Capes and islands came slowly out to meet them, growing green with their approach. The harbour of Kiirun opened like a grey hollow among the hills with the foam white along the bar. They slowly entered.

They trained immediately to Taihoku where they installed Martha at the Railway Hotel, but Cartwright was in too great a hurry to be at the end of his pilgrimage to allow of a night there for the rest

of them. He looked so tired and wasted that Stephen and Laura begged him to rest, but the suggestion of delay threw him into a violent agitation. He didn't even want to see Gregory: "Fine fellow, but he talks." He was obviously relieved when the management, at Stephen's enquiry, told him that Gregory was out somewhere, they didn't know where. Martha lodged a formal protest at letting Cartwright out of her care—"What'll happen to that great baby between you is more than I can say!"—and succumbed to the prospect of repose. After a meal they returned to the station.

Cartwright booked sleepers for Laura and Stephen on the south-going train. "I'll sit up," he said. "Only a few hours; and can't sleep in any case." The cousins retired to their bunks not knowing where they were bound for. Something before dawn they found themselves disembarked at a little place named Nisui where they breakfasted at a Japanese inn just by the station—charming little *né-san*!—and re-embarked on the slowest train in the world which plied up some private branch line into the hills. They were too sleepy to take much note of the country about them. They seemed to be following the bank of a river—a stony bed, for the most part, in spite of the late rains—which drew out from a distant gap in the hills. But a veil of mist hung over the valley reducing the landscape to a cheerless monotone of grey. They nodded and dozed. After some two hours they found themselves at the terminus. Gwaishatei was the name on the board. The place was composed of the station,

principally, approached by a swamp, and a few beggarly bamboo huts. But they had no time to look about them. Chinese coolies, paddling bare-foot in the mud, dispossessed them of their luggage, and hailed them to a line of push-cars. A babel of chattering resolved itself at last into the intelligible question, did they want a sunshade? Looking at the sky they thought they might want a rain-shade, so they nodded consent. Meanwhile how were they to arrange themselves? A push-car holds two people only. Cartwright said he would sit with the luggage, and Stephen and Laura could share the next car. To save himself from the company of a fat Japanese official Cartwright bought an extra ticket, and installed himself in lonely state on the wicker seat. The sunshades were brought—square linen covers erected on four bamboo poles, like a bathing tent without the sides—and tied on to the cars. There may have been some twenty passengers in all, Japanese for the most part, students, tourists, Government officials, black-coated, sun-helmeted; an unpleasant and arrogant set. The coolies lined up by the train, two to a car, clothed in thin blue jackets and shorts, some bareheaded, some with wide round sun-hats. A whistle blew, and they started.

They were wider awake now. This seemed like a beginning.

CHAPTER VIII

IT was great fun. The narrow-gauge line wound along a muddy track, skirting up the sides of the hills between rice-fields and banana plantations, tilting sharply over as it rounded the bends, crossing crazy wooden bridges over the lateral gullies, crossing suspension bridges where it spanned the valleys. Occasionally they came to a downward slope, and the coolies, crouched on the backs of the cars, indulged in a child-like craze for speed. It seemed impossible that the springless trollies could keep to the rickety toy line. At the first few corners they held their breath in anticipation of disaster, but miraculously the car kept to the track. Then as the way climbed up again they were left to speculate on the excitements of the return journey. A scorching at the knees brought Stephen to the sudden realization that the Formosan sun had pierced the mists. He drew his legs under the sheltering shadow of the sunshade. The coolies, already streaming with perspiration, drew off their soaked jackets and bent to their work naked to the waist. They pushed with one outstretched rigid arm, the other arm limp at their sides, their heads bowed, for all the world like the pictures you see of Assyrian slaves. And except for occasional short respites the path climbed relentlessly upwards. Yet they swung forward at a pace that would have killed

a trained army, and at the end of five hours, with only rare short halts, they showed no sign of fatigue.

The country became increasingly wilder. They left the rice-fields and the sugar-cane below them, with the wading herons and the wallowing buffaloes, and the neat farmsteads set about with slender top-knotted palms and willowy bamboos. They passed by little lost settlements of bamboo huts, and at long intervals drew into a township—a single wide street with sidings for the cars, lined with deeply verandahed single-storied shops, the door-posts and lintels painted red and inscribed with Chinese characters, the interiors showing like black hollows behind the wares set out in baskets in the open windows. Here they bought bananas at laughable prices, and papayas, and oranges, and rice dumplings packed up in leaves. Then the whistle would blow, and they would set out again, winding up among great conical hills massed with an abundant vegetation which lined the track like a solid wall. Enormous trees shot up from among the giant ferns and grasses, roped round with creepers, corded and knotted into an inextricable density. The imagination could tunnel no path through it, except one resolutely laboured axe in hand. And the air was hot and humid from the rank exhalations of the earth beneath the devouring sun. Immense swathes of vapour gathered from nowhere, enveloping the hills in a white opacity, to be sucked up steaming into the dissolving air. Sitting there in the shadow, with no call for exertion, the cousins responded with a pleasing thrill

to the unnameable appeal of the wild and luxuriant land.

But at a word from Cartwright everything changed. They had dismounted at a steep incline, walking in single file at the edge of the narrow track while the coolies toiled at the empty cars. "All so different," Cartwright said to them over his shoulder. "Nothing of this in the old days. And I was here alone." Alone! They remounted; but the romantic glamour of the landscape had gone, and in its stead was something menacing, something oppressive. This was no place to be alone in. And with his friend dead behind him; with the head-hunters on his trail. . . . During a longer downward grade the cars spaced themselves out, became isolated by the curves of the track. Frequently the couple found themselves with no one in sight in front or behind. Only they two, and the coolies crouched at their backs. The sudden hills loomed toweringly above them, rank beneath the sunshine, ghostly through the mists, ringing them round as though from all possibility of escape, with heads over-peering one another, linking arms across the valleys, shouldering into the gaps. Vigilant and impenetrable, they held them in a trap. It seemed impossible that the slender path they were following had ever had a beginning or could ever have an end. They were astray in a world without issue. The open sky was a mockery to them, having no wings. And it rained down upon them with a scorching and vertical heat, then enveloping them in its monstrous play of vapours left them chilled to the bone. A man caught alone here would have the

chance of a rat in a den of lions. And indeed, inhaling the hot strange odours that seemed to lie about the atmosphere in languid pools, it was as though they could feel the breath upon them of nameless monsters regarding them silent and paw-suspended as they crept about their feet.

And what must Cartwright's feelings be, they wondered. Laura wanted to sit with him, but he refused her company. For hour after hour they had their eyes on him, lonely and erect beside the baggage. They spoke of him, speculating on his purpose, sentimentalising over his distress, their hearts saddening towards him with a futile and dumb compassion. . . .

It was a relief to come suddenly out into a wide valley, almost a plain, where the rice-paddies met them again. They drew into Hori where they changed cars for Gyochi. The train was diminished to three cars now, their two and one other occupied by a couple of Japanese officials. The officials secured a sunshade, but for some reason there was no shade for Cartwright and the cousins. Cartwright protested vehemently. The officials, secure beneath their shelter, sat unperturbed while Cartwright quarrelled with the coolies, and with the clerks in the ticket office, impotently denouncing the favouritism shown to the Japanese. "Just because they've stolen the damned place!" he lapsed into English. But his outburst only left him with a red and streaming face. He launched one last tirade at the officials themselves. "Thanks to your honourable shadow," he called to them ironically in Japanese, "my daughter will die of sunstroke. For your extreme kindness

to helpless strangers I am abundantly and humbly grateful ! ” They paid not the least heed, not so much as glancing at each other, according him the comment merely of a pair of resolute and uncompromising backs.

The coolies motioned them to embark. Stephen opened Laura's parasol and held it over her. Being of Japanese make the top threatened to fly off at any moment in the moving air. Fortunately so, perhaps, because keeping watch on the thing engrossed his attention and held him from undue brooding. In a couple of hours they were at their destination. And here even the push-car line ended, and they must walk. Cartwright secured a porter from a crowd of eager and clamorous applicants. The fellow swung the luggage from the ends of his bamboo shoulder-pole and trotted ahead of them in his quick, short, springy Chinese step to show them the road to Suisha. The name meant nothing to Stephen, but like the names of all the places on this journey he kept it registered in his mind lest it might prove to have some significance. And it had this significance at least that it was the last outpost of the civilization they were gradually leaving behind.

The way climbed sharply up into the hills by a stony path which clung to the edge of a steep winding slope, overlooking a valley of tree-tops like a green river, overhung with a canopy of foliage like a green sky. Gullies cut swiftly down across it. Red knuckles of rock pushed naked through the ferns. Thick dry creepers like the ragged ends of torn rigging hung in loops and tangles from the

branches overhead. The condensing mists dripped from the leaves above like a slow rain. The path began to zig-zag away from the valley-side up a shoulder of hill, tunnelling its way through a dense and overshadowing vegetation. It grew soft with rotting leaves, sodden from the endless damp drip of the trees. And suddenly at the summit the prospect opened on to the wide waters of a lake lying grey in a ring of misty hills.

"Candidius," said Cartwright ; adding, "Jitsugetsutan, I believe they call it now."

The long climb had visibly wearied him. Laura wanted him to rest, but he pushed petulantly forward. "Poor old dad !" Laura said to Stephen. "And all because we quarrelled !"

They could see now that the sun had given way to heavy low clouds threatening rain. The splendour had gone. The country showed sullen, lonely, and formidable. "All because we quarrelled !" Laura's comment repeated itself at Stephen's heart as though explaining why a delightful adventure was being turned thwart and awry.

They dropped down without a further word towards the lake, skirting it by a woodland track which hid the water from them, and coming once more into the open found themselves in the Taiwanese settlement of Suisha lying flat at the mouth of a low valley which opened out from the lake. "Yadoya," Cartwright said curtly to the guide. The guide waved them up hill towards a Japanese inn which faced them from higher up the slope.

Evening was already closing over them. It was beginning to rain. They were tired. The stupid

little extra climb to the *yadoya* seemed needlessly annoying. And the inn itself, when they came to it, looked abandoned and dilapidated, the lower wooden shutters inhospitably closed, the paper showing patched and torn in the doorway *shoji*. Even the hostess had a cast in her eye. They were shown into an upper room. The mats were alive with ants. They would have shifted to the next apartment, but the *fusuma* screens refused to slide apart, threatening to collapse altogether if they forced them. And somehow they didn't care. They squatted about the dead *hibachi*, waiting for bath and supper, gazing listlessly across the grey lake to where the farther shore showed dimly through the mist. "You are in the middle of Formosa," Cartwright informed them.

They became aware of a faint music coming over the water, an unresonant tinkling as though from wooden bells, followed by a soft singing, curiously familiar after the outlandish tumults they had been treated to in civilized Japan. It was sweet and appealing with the wistful pathos of an Irish melody. It touched them. It called to them. . . .

"The savages," said Cartwright. He waved a hand vaguely towards the lake, adding, "Tomorrow. Over there. . . ."

CHAPTER IX

THEY were travelling light as regards clothes, but they carried a couple of tents, ground-sheets and bedding, a stove, a few necessary crocks, some ten days' provisions—and a revolver. Cartwright had seen to the luggage, and until he began sorting it out that evening the cousins didn't really know what it consisted of. Probably Cartwright didn't intend them to see the revolver, because when it unexpectedly came to light he pushed it hastily into his pocket, grumbling, "You never know in a place like this. Probably won't need it at all." It was impossible to stow everything in the ruck-sacks, so they reduced their personal belongings to the minimum and strapped the rest up in one big load to be carried by a porter. There would be no difficulty in securing one, Cartwright said, in the savage village across the lake.

The cousins didn't know where they were heading for. In filling up the inn guest-book Cartwright had written vaguely in the destination column, "Travelling in the interior." This had somewhat perturbed their hostess. Would they condescend to be more precise? Cartwright wanted to know—in English—what the hell their destination had to do with her. In Japanese he expressed himself, not exactly in those terms, but rudely enough. The hostess bowed to the mats, smiling with an in-

expressive patience but with something quizzical in her affected eye, and sent for the police. Accordingly a fat fellow in a white uniform, gaitered, helmeted, carrying a sword and revolver, paid them a visit of enquiry. It was necessary that they should state where they were going, for the information of the police—who were responsible for the safety of travellers in the island. Cartwright flourished at him their Government permission to travel which he had obtained when they first came to Formosa. The fellow received it deferentially with both hands, examined it with a fixed smile, hissing through his teeth. “*Saaa!* But this was signed three weeks ago,” he pointed out. “The permission extends to three months,” Cartwright countered. “That is honourably so, but——” the man admitted, with head tilted uncertainly to one side, and tapping the paper with his finger. The interview ended amicably in compliments and cigarettes. Unbending his legs to rise the fellow warned them, “You will of course keep to the road. There are no inns, I am sorry, but there are police-posts where you will be honourably welcome. But if you leave the road it may be dangerous, and then when your Government inquires for you we cannot find your bodies.”

They were up before the sun. A Chinese boy rowed them across the lake, standing in the stern of his shallow sampan to manœuvre his single oar. They passed an island on the way, the shore fringed with fish-traps. A few dug-out canoes passed them slowly by, paddled by savages who greeted them unexpectedly in Japanese, “*Konnichi wa!*” They returned the salute, surprised by their evident

friendliness. A little disappointed too. They had expected to see the savages dressed in some bright barbaric costume, but they had evidently come to adopt the Chinese jacket and trousers. It was the same in the village, they found, when they landed. "All so different," Cartwright complained; "but farther in—we shall see."

A straggling path roughly stepped climbed up among rectangular bamboo huts, lying flat against the wooded background of the hills, irregularly scattered, yet all gabled towards the water. The doorways opened into an inner darkness black like a tunnel. Here and there were open spaces for the rice-pounding. Dogs and little black pigs nosed in and out among the dwellings. Some men passed by with nets and lines, and some women with long bamboo holders going down to the lake to draw water. Rather a fine-looking people, with long solemn faces like American Indians, and muscular lean arms and legs. Cartwright stopped a group and addressed them in a language entirely strange to the cousins. For a moment the savages stared at him in silence, then suddenly comprehending they broke into an eager chatter, smiling delightedly like children. Stephen and Laura exchanged glances. The savages turned about and excitedly beckoned to the party to follow. They were escorted to a hut in the middle of the settlement, rather larger than the rest, cleaner too and neater. After rapid explanations at the doorway they were invited to enter. "The Headman," Cartwright said shortly as they stepped into darkness.

The next moment his hand was being violently

shaken by a swarthy savage who had materialized out of the gloom. Stephen and Laura realized that they were being introduced. They bowed and smiled. Stools were set for them on the uneven mud floor, little things a few inches high. They squatted and looked about them. Cartwright and the Headman were already deep in conversation like long-parted friends suddenly reunited, completely oblivious to the couple. The escort still crowded at the door, robbing the windowless hut of its only light. An old woman was crouched over a smoke-hole busied with her cooking : a sort of thin broth, it seemed to be, in a round shallow pan with herbs submerged and floating. She nodded to the cousins a continuous and inarticulate welcome, every wrinkle of her face alight with pleasure. A few children became visible, watching them with wide eyes, squatting motionless on the floor. In one corner was a partition showing behind it a rough bed. In another corner a cabinet. Against the wall opposite to them an enormous earthen jar large enough to store a year's supply of rice for the whole settlement. The hut must have been built round it, or a wall taken down to admit it ; it could never have passed through the door. But the place had an earthy and smoky smell. There was something a little disconcerting, too, in the way in which the light fell on the whites of eyes fixed on them through the gloom.

Once the Headman spoke to the group at the door. Some minutes later a youth entered, saluted the Headman, and was invited to squat. The Headman seemed to be giving him orders, while he nodded

comprehension, staring at Cartwright. The three of them fell into an animated palaver, though Cartwright seemed to speak with a certain halting hesitation. Perhaps it lasted an hour. When they left the hut the morning was bright about them. They had to return to the boat to recover their gear. The lad who had joined them was to be their guide and porter. He looked some seventeen or eighteen years old, slender but muscular, with a certain premature gravity in his face, but—as they had already seen in the hut—delivering himself with a rapid and dramatic emphasis when he broke into speech. But now he had fallen silent. He slung the big bundle of kit over his shoulders, supporting it with a band round the forehead, thrusting his head forward and taking the strain, it seemed, with his neck. With their escort still chattering behind them, and fingering to relieve them of their rucksacks, they climbed the path once again, this time winding through the village and up into the hills beyond. On reaching the first ridge their companions bade them farewell, and turned down again towards the lake. They began to drop into a valley, and were immediately cut off from all sight and sound of the settlement behind them. “In the middle of Formosa. . . .” They knew that the last stage of the pilgrimage had begun.

The stony track was only wide enough for two. The guide went ahead, followed by Cartwright. Stephen and Laura walked behind. By glimpses between the great boles of the trees they could see the piled-up masses of the hills like the arrested waves of some enormous ocean. They rose billow

beyond green billow, showing through the gaps and above the lower summits the blue peaks of distant mountains. At rare intervals a little square of brown showed nakedly among the greenery, where a native had cleared a plot of earth on the slope of a valley-side and had set up his bamboo hut. But these insignificant and isolated scratchings of the soil only intensified the surrounding immensity of the unclaimed country which lay veiled and secret beneath its relentless canopy of green.

Then of a sudden they turned sharply away from the track they had been following into a narrow path that pushed through a closing screen of grasses into a world which resolved itself into two walls of tangled undergrowth beneath a roof of leaves and creepers. "This is how we take good advice!" Cartwright called back over his shoulder with a mock cheeriness; adding, "But I hope to goodness that damned *junsa* won't take it into his head to wire on about us. They'll have search parties scouring the country." The thought seemed to amuse him.

They had to walk single file here, so Stephen dropped behind. The path underfoot was soft with moss and fallen leaves so that all at once their march became strangely muffled. The wet blades of the grasses cut against their legs. The ferns held out damp hands against their faces. The thorns caught at them like claws. The air was hazy and humid, oppressing their lungs like steam from a bath. They lost all view of the hills, and for long stretches all view of the sky. Sometimes they seemed to enter a belt of cold vapour, which closed over them like a ghostly river, to emerge again into

the earlier tepidity. When the sun struck through it was like the touch of a hot iron. Yet they became covered in a chill perspiration which set them shivering in spite of the enveloping heat. It was a welcome break in the monotony of the journey to meet some obstacle in the path, a boulder rolled down in some convulsion, a fallen tree. They would scramble over them, or plunge into the undergrowth to circumvent them, panting from the exertion, so that recommencing their march their breathing sounded heavily above the padding of their feet. Sometimes the path lay through a swamp or crossed a gully, where they had to pick their way carefully over half-submerged stepping-stones, or paddle through a racing water-slide with the stones shifting underneath their feet, and always in a semi-gloom of roofing leaves and grasses. But this was preferable to the unchanging tedium of the forest. Perhaps three times in the day a party of aborigines, some five or six, would meet them, suddenly confronting them like an apparition with no warning of their approach, scarlet figures, startling and picturesque, and with a salutation were gone, swallowed behind them in the bush. Their native costume, in contrast to the guide's Chinese dress, was another reminder of their loosening contact with their own world.

Stephen and Laura were glad when Cartwright announced a halt for lunch. Somehow the labour was exhausting them, though the path was seldom steep and their packs were not heavy. But the monotony was sapping their energy by wearing down their spirits. They trampled flat a little

clearing beside a rivulet which cutting across the path over a stony channel widened out to either side a shadowy space under the doming trees. They spread a ground-sheet on the flattened grass, and taking off their boots sat with their feet in the icy water. The rest and the food cheered and refreshed them. They talked a little, though their voices sounded strangely muffled in the cloaking gloom. Cartwright told them something of the tribe they had come to : the Tsuwo, a friendly and peaceful people who had sheltered him during his terrible flight from the Bunan head-hunters farther up in the hills. The cousins let him talk without flurrying him with questions. It was easier to get at the truth so, though it was slow in coming, and whatever it might be in its ultimate significance they could neither of them divine.

“ I was pretty near broken,” he told them. “ No jolly white policemen in those days to keep track of your carcass. No guides either—except a nose with a *flair* for gold. And this sort of stifling country to wade through—and higher up, more open certainly, but dizzy—a fellow isn’t responsible. I’m not making excuses, mind you. But I put it to you. It’s gloomy, isn’t it? Where’s the sky gone to? How do you know what’s behind those bamboos? If they started to open now, to show a face peering at you? And here we’re among friends. But how if you’re among enemies? Damn fellows with no grudge against you—rather fond of you, I dare say—but with an itch for your head? Follow you for miles, creeping, a spear’s thrust away from you, feel them there but invisible, with

eyes on you through the leaves. You get to seeing them at last. A glint among the grasses ! What is it ? The white of an eye ? A knife ? . . .”

He paused on a low laugh. Laura breathed heavily, and stirred where she sat. From the corner of his eye Stephen saw her lay a hand on her father's knee. But for his own part he kept his gaze intently on the water. Something in it fascinated him. It glided out from under the crushing vegetation to vanish like a snake among the roots and leaves of the bushes that walled in the little vault-like hollow on the other side. Cartwright began to speak again with a growing agitation :

“Of course, a fellow can only die once. And worse deaths, I dare say, than a neat cut through the neck. But it unsettles you. You can't reason against that sort of terror. When it's on you you streak straight ahead, must move, put the miles behind you, escape. You have no body. You feel no fatigue, no pain. You perform prodigies. . . . But when the strain's over your body comes back to life, shrieks to be heard. . . . Not entirely responsible. . . . Of course, there were two of us—at first. Even so, the thing's just there, at arm's length, ready to leap in and take you by the throat. Months of that while we worked. . . . Then later I was alone. . . .”

Stephen couldn't bring himself to look at him, guessing at the agony in his white drawn face. “Dear daddy !” Laura said. “But does all that matter now ?”

“Matter ?” he cried with a curious bitterness. He seemed to be feeling for words. Then in an

altered tone he said, "Come, let's get on again. Soon be over. And as likely as not those blasted police are already sniffing on our trail."

They were glad to be on the move once more, just as they had been glad of the rest. But almost with the first step the old monotony reclaimed them. It had been irritating, now it became maddening, hour after hour to follow a track which endured for ever and reached nowhere. And except for a momentary glimpse there was no prospect. And the glimpse was cruel like a flash of sight to a blind man. Of a sudden the hills would unroll before them, and were instantaneously gone again. They were closed in, not only to either side, but in front and behind. The bushes opened to let them through and fell together after them as they passed. With each movement of the arm as they brushed them aside they looked for some break, some change, and were met with the same everlasting dumb suffocation of green. Stephen kept finding himself pressing at Laura's heels as though under the urgency to hurry, and would fall back again keeping a deliberate check on his pace. Then he became somnolent and apathetic, mechanically moving the branches aside, heedless of his footing, vaguely conscious of an impression of sinking into something yielding and absorbing without prospect of issue or return.

He didn't know why he was there, except that he was following his uncle ; and he didn't know why his uncle was there, except that he seemed to be goaded by some obsession to revisit the scene of the tragedy that had broken his life. He remem-

bered how, first coming to Formosa, he had looked forward with an intense anticipation to this journey as the very goal of all their pilgrimage. But somehow the glory had gone from the thing. It had become involved in troublesome emotions, losing its earlier clear singleness of purpose. It affected Laura and himself—but a certain revulsion of shame held him from attempting to get that in focus. He thought of his uncle alone in that place. He wondered if the police were really sniffing on their trail. And why should they wish to avoid the police? They were among friends; but there might be enemies ahead. His thoughts became incoherent. . . . The guide in front gave a sudden cry, and sprang aside from the path. Cartwright lifted his stick and dealt a blow at the ground. Stephen pushed in front of Laura to see what had happened. A green snake lay coiled on the path, its head beaten into the ooze. It still quivered. . . . Of a sudden Stephen was on the alert again. The forest lost its absorbing aspect of monotony. There was a lurking menace in its quietude. It wouldn't do to go to sleep here. He moved on with nerves restrung, with eyes vigilant, choosing his steps.

At last towards evening they came into more open country, climbing up the slope of a long wide valley to a settlement high on the crest. From the distance they could see the bright scarlet figures of the natives moving against the green of the hill-side. As they drew near the natives gathered to watch them, silent and severe, the men with naked arms crossed over woven blanket-like smocks, bare-legged, bare-footed, the women with long-sleeved blue bodices

over the top of the breast above a square red wrapping tied about the waist and covering the thighs, bare-footed like the men, but wearing loose shin-covers tied under the knees. There was an instantaneous appeal in the rich clear colouring of their barbaric dress, as though it fulfilled an elemental need in the luxuriant green land, inexpressible, but felt like a void at the spirit. This people belonged to the country, possessed it. Stephen felt himself warm towards them. Laura too. "If only we were to stay here," she said. But they knew this wasn't the goal.

The guide spoke to one of the men. The severity broke into immediate smiles and chatter. Once again they were escorted to the Headman. But while Cartwright palavered in the hut Stephen and Laura pitched the two tents on the rice-pounding floor in front, and prepared supper, encircled by the whole village. Supper over, they watched for a little the sunset make a beacon of the hills setting half the sky in a scarlet conflagration. But they were too tired for æsthetic raptures. They had made a two days' march in a day. They turned in and were immediately asleep.

CHAPTER X

WE needn't follow them step by step through the next day's march. By comparison it was altogether pleasanter, at least for the first half of the way. The air was cooler and more bracing, blowing to them clean from the mountains. The riotous growth of the lower levels had given way to more open country. The hills were still thickly forested, mostly with fire-tree with here and there a magnolia in bloom ; but the trees stood more freely spaced, less strangled with creepers, less encumbered with undergrowth, letting the sky through between their roofing tops and allowing a prospect of ridges and valleys between their boles. Gigantic boles, buttressed and tapering, dwarfing one into conscious insignificance, straight though shaggily limbed like the columns of some ancient temple half obliterated by jungle. They were mighty, but free of that earlier oppressive menace ; yet even here it would be difficult to escape from your enemies. They could not shadow you " a spear's thrust away," but they could stalk you from trunk to trunk, from bush to bush.

Once the guide motioned them to halt while he went on ahead. They heard him calling to them, and they followed. Then, just as they were up with him, he signalled them swiftly to hide themselves, and quickly disencumbering himself of his luggage

dropped it behind a bush and sauntered innocently forward. Someone addressed him sharply in Japanese. A glimpse of white through the leaves told them it was a policeman. The boy's Chinese dress showed that he came from the lake. The policeman wanted to know his business so far from his home. He was on a visit to relatives. How was it that his relatives lived in the hills when he came from the lake? It was a different voice questioning this time. Two policemen. The boy launched into a circumstantial story, quoting names of ancestors, names of places, deaths and births, necessities of livelihood, necessities of education, a bewildering rigmarole detailed and involved, explaining nothing, reaching nowhere. One of the policemen cut him short: had he seen any white men at the lake?—White men, yes. They had come to hear the music. And after that where had they gone? Back across the lake. He was certain? Quite certain. When was that? Perhaps a moon ago. The policemen became angry. They weren't talking about a moon ago, but two days ago. Had he seen any white men two days ago?—At the lake?—Yes, at the lake.—But it was already four days now since he left the lake.—Four days? So! The policemen consulted together. After all it was possible, likely even. In any case the white men could hardly have come as far as this already, whatever a native might do. The *seiyôjin* soon tire; and they had a woman with them. With a last warning to the boy that if he saw any white men he must report it immediately to the nearest police-post they pushed a little way into the bushes, gave

a cursory glance round, and moved away. The boy moved on too, quietly returning some ten minutes later to say that all was clear. He shouldered his bundle again, and reassuring himself that the policemen had really gone beckoned to the others to follow. They crossed a narrow highway, which the policemen were evidently patrolling, and plunged on the other side into the forest again, breathing freely at having avoided the protection of the law as though they had escaped from some peril.

Occasionally they met parties of natives in their scarlet smocks of woven cloth. The boy held short consultations with them, presumably asking them to keep the secret of the white people's presence there. Then in the afternoon they met a group entirely different; broader and more stocky, rounder browed, rounder faced, altogether more ferocious, wearing brown fur tunics over kilts of chocolate-coloured cloth, with heavy yellow-metal wristlets and necklaces of beads, embossed shoulder-straps, and a band of spikes round the hair. The tunics falling open showed knives sheathed at their belts, and some of them carried flint-lock rifles.

They appeared suddenly at a turn in the path. They started when they saw the foreign party, and made as if to hide in the bushes, but becoming reassured crept out again, and lined the path as Cartwright and the cousins passed, glaring at them with a lowering and ugly malice, except for one fellow who beamed upon them with an immense wide smile, inclining his head deeply to each in turn. The thought of them behind was unpleasant. The boy showed signs of dismay. When they were out

of sight he turned suddenly to Cartwright and began to chatter and gesticulate, throwing in a phrase or two to Stephen in Japanese. He wasn't altogether lucid, but Stephen gathered that these were Tamawalu warriors they had met, one of the many savage Bunan tribes. They were trespassing into the territory of the Tsuwo. They had no business there. The boy was for turning back, for finding the policemen again and warning them. He hesitated at the prospect of pushing farther ahead. Cartwright argued with him, pacified him. The boy's face lost its agitation, became sombre and severe. He turned and began to move on. Stephen would have taken his side, fearing for Laura, but it wouldn't have done to intervene in his presence. So he followed after, but keeping a wary eye behind.

Cartwright called jovially back to him, as though to ease the strain, "Did you see the gold on them, Steve?"

"Was it gold?" he asked. He presumed his uncle meant the wristlets and the spikes in the hair.

"Gold right enough," Cartwright answered.

They became silent again.

At times Stephen thought he heard a rustling behind him. It was easy to imagine it, of course, so he tried to pay no attention to it. But once looking sharply back he caught a gleam of yellow among the bushes, too transitory to be convincing, but disturbing enough. After that he watched more carefully, with the feeling growing on him that the party had turned and was following them. He dropped back a little to investigate. Cartwright happened to notice it, and called sharply back to

him, "Hey, don't linger there, old chap. Must hold together."

"Anything wrong?" Stephen asked.

"The usual enemy—time," Cartwright answered cheerily. "Ought to be pushing on."

Stephen wasn't satisfied with the answer. His uncle's sudden access of cheeriness was somehow alarming. It seemed to be a hint to the boy to show no uneasiness before Laura. "Righto!" he called back, and pressed up to the little file again. But for all that he kept an eye on the alert behind him. Yet after an hour or more he had seen nothing clear, had heard nothing definite, but was more convinced than ever that somebody was on their trail. He was determined to risk his uncle's displeasure to satisfy his curiosity. Taking advantage of a bend in the path, which was continually winding in and out of the huge trees, he stepped aside behind one of the buttressed trunks and dropping to his hands and knees peered back along the track under cover of the low shoots that grew up about the bole. But no one came. He was just getting up when at some little remove from the path he got a clear view of a spiky gold head-band. It was a momentary flash only, but it was enough. For another second he waited in case there was more to be seen, but he didn't want to be caught spying. There was at least one of the savages following them, not along the track, but suspiciously removed, stalking them behind bushes. Crouching as low as he could Stephen doubled after the others. They had halted for him, but luckily he saw them in time to abandon his tell-tale crouching.

"What the hell now?" his uncle greeted him, unable to conceal his agitation.

"Broken lace," Stephen answered laconically.

"One of those damned Japanese things, I suppose!" Cartwright grumbled; and once again they moved on. Stephen didn't give his uncle any more trouble, but he was conscious of Cartwright's eyes on him from time to time as though he wasn't to be trusted. He knew there was something not quite right, and that his uncle knew it too. He respected his uncle's desire to keep it hidden from Laura, but he was angry with him for involving Laura in such a business at all. It wasn't the danger he resented, but the kind of danger. Why couldn't they have followed the road, kept in touch with the police, asked for an escort, only too readily granted by the authorities? Why all this secrecy and mystification? Or was this sudden menace something unsuspected and unforeseen? Stephen realized that he was taking up a curious attitude towards the affair. He had never been accustomed to grumble at a little danger, not even for Laura. But now his relations with his cousin seemed strangely altered. The thought that some unknown peril was menacing the girl seemed suddenly intolerable. He decided that it was time that Cartwright told them something more definite of his intentions. He decided to ask his uncle that night, before they pushed any further into danger. Up to now he and Laura had followed Cartwright blindly, feeling a certain shame at pressing him for particulars when they knew that they themselves were responsible for the journey. Especially was it so

with Stephen, with the memory of that night in the Yoshiwara on his conscience. But now it was time to come to an understanding.

They had been rising all day, except for occasional short descents between ridges. The path now began to zigzag up a steep slope of mountain. They were already fatigued, and the weary climb began to tell on them. They rested frequently, in spite of Cartwright's anxiety to push on. Stephen could see that Laura was feeling the strain, and would call a halt on his own authority. "No, no!" Cartwright would protest. "Soon be at the top now." But Stephen would insist for Laura's sake, feeling more and more angry with his uncle. Cartwright would refuse to sit down, saying it made it all the more difficult to walk again. "Like going to sleep," he said. "Feel far more tired when you wake up." Laura wanted to yield to her father, but Stephen resolutely threw off his pack and sat on the ground, saying, "All right, you walk on. I'll rest a bit," knowing quite well what his uncle's answer to that would be. Then Laura would follow his example, confessing that she was almost at the end of her strength. "I believe father is too," she said to Stephen, regarding her father anxiously, "but he's too proud to show it." And she was right. While still some half-dozen laps from the summit Cartwright sank to the ground in a half-faint. Laura was immediately beside him, forcing his head down between his knees. He soon came round, but his face had turned a deathly white. "All this silly sitting about!" he complained pettishly, accepting Stephen's offer of the whisky flask. He tried to

rise, but they held him down till he was more rested. He yielded perforce. His face was drenched with perspiration. They could see the blood pulsing at his temples.

They must have rested half an hour. Stephen was on the watch for signs of their pursuer, but either he had ceased to follow them, or else he kept himself well concealed. At length Cartwright got to his feet again. He was in a better temper now. "Perhaps we've been overdoing it," he admitted. "These zigzags—never seem to end. Get on a fellow's nerves. Always think another lap will see you through. . . . Well, damned silly of me to go off like that all the same. Sorry!" They plodded upward.

They must have mounted fifteen hundred feet from base to summit. Then suddenly they were at the top. It was as though they had climbed a wall and were looking into another world. They were well among the mountains now. The forest behind them hid the country through which they had passed, but in front of them was a sea of crests and ridges, purple in the late light of the evening, with here and there a sharp peak flaming. Below them a river showed in a winding band of white among grey rocks and boulders, seething, though they could hear the merest murmur only of its turmoil. The path fell away in a zigzag, soon lost beneath the trees, but on the farthest slope—when their guide pointed it out to them—they could see it sheering up from the valley in a slanting line, obscured here and there with the growth of the hill-side, suddenly disappearing behind bulging boulders and angles of

cliff, emerging again like a thread stretched taut between the dwindling clumps of greenery, or like a crack across some sudden face of precipice, gradually reaching towards a distant saddle in the ridge. A very different path from the one they had been following, because the mountains had grown steeper, barer, fiercer, showing naked shoulders of granite among the shrub. The path no longer dived and burrowed, but instead it clung dizzily to a precarious wall of rock.

But that was for the morrow. The guide refused to go a step farther. And indeed it would have been foolish. The tropic evening was already closing them round. Besides, not a hundred yards away was a clearing with a few huts where they could pitch their tents for the night.

So they turned aside to the clearing, and pitched camp. Laura, of course, had a tent to herself; Cartwright and Stephen shared the other; the guide would sleep in one of the huts. While Cartwright was palavering with the natives—sealing their mouths, probably, against police inquisitiveness—Stephen and Laura sat outside, Stephen turning over in his mind what he was to say to his uncle. Would it be better to ask him direct why he had brought them there? . . . But it was difficult to think clearly, because Laura kept throwing in a word. She was troubled about her father's state. That fainting fit. Stephen had to listen.

"He's tired," he said. "He'll be all right tomorrow."

"We're all tired," she retorted, "but with him there's something more. Something on his mind."

"Always has been ever since I knew him," said Stephen.

Laura was silent. Glancing at her Stephen knew he had offended her.

"All right," he tried to pacify her, "this country's enough to get on anybody's mind. And remember, he's been here before. You know as well as I do what that means."

"I know as little as you," she corrected him.

"Well, I'm going to talk to him about it to-night," Stephen told her.

"No, never!" she exclaimed, laying a hand on his arm.

He was taken aback by her sudden emotion :
"But—why ever not?"

She let her hand fall. "We owe it to him—to trust him," she said quietly.

"Even if——" Stephen began ; but it was silly to mention danger to Laura.

They were silent for a little. Stephen felt a vague suspicion that Laura understood more of the affair than he did. Had her father taken her into his confidence? That wasn't likely ; he had always confided in Stephen rather than in Laura. Or had she by some subtle intuition divined her father's secret? He tried to get his thoughts in order again, but she interrupted him once more :

"What troubles me is, will he stand it?"

"You mean, physically?" Stephen asked, not quite certain what she had in mind.

"Well yes, physically—morally ; with him it's all the same," she said. "You see, he'll spare nothing to get there ; but afterwards?"

Certainly he was in a fit state to collapse once the strain was over. Collapse morally as well as physically. What did Laura mean? The return journey suddenly loomed menacingly in front of him. The man was in a fair way to going mad. And if the natives should show ugly? . . .

"Look!" Laura exclaimed in a half-whisper.

Through the dusk they could see dark figures moving where an angle of the downward path lay bare. A glint of gold at the wrists and hair told them who they were. They vanished without a sound. Laura sat watching where they disappeared. Stephen felt relieved, thinking that after all they had not been on their trail, or if so they had missed them—for the time, at any rate. Besides, what could they possibly want? . . .

"There should be one more," Laura said.

"How on earth?" Stephen exclaimed.

"I happened to count them," she told him.

His alarm returned tenfold. "But look here," he reasoned with her—with himself too—"you can't be certain that you saw them all. It's pretty dark."

"Yes, of course," she admitted, "I may have missed one. Or he may have gone on ahead. Or he may be behind. Or they may be a different party altogether. But still. . . ."

For a long time they sat there, watching the path till they could see it no longer. From the huts they could occasionally hear Cartwright's voice among the voices of the natives, speaking uncertainly in some curious tongue. It seemed to estrange him from them, to set him in some world to which they

had no entry, isolating them in the midst of this wild and threatening land. Stephen forced himself to speak, talking of this and that, trying to take Laura's mind from their uneasy situation. He suggested at last that they should turn in.

"But why doesn't he come?" she said.

"He seems to have friends among these people," Stephen answered.

"Oh, I don't mean father," she said.

"Well, who?" he asked simply.

"Really, Steve," she laughed, "it's awfully thoughtful of you to try not to frighten me, but don't you think we'd manage this thing better if we were a little franker with each other? You know, it's extraordinary how well you can mend boot-laces!"

For a moment he was completely puzzled. Then he saw her meaning. Why the deuce hadn't he seen to it that a lace was really broken?

"Well, all the same," he declared defiantly, "there can't be anything to fear or your father wouldn't have brought you here."

"And the moon's rising," she remarked inconsequentially, "so I think I'll go to bed."

PART III

CHAPTER XI

STEPHEN began to walk up and down under the night. The moon was growing rapidly brighter, suffusing the air with a ghostly and deceptive radiance, throwing up the forms of things in masses of confused relief, distinguishing nothing. The little clearing lay bare to the sky, closed round with abrupt black shadows where the bush began. The valley below, thickening with mist, had become a silvery opacity melting right and left into an obscure greyness without limit or outline over which the stars shone ; only the farther ridge, and the more immediate trees, stood up sharply defined against the sky. From the forest around came the noises of a furtive and vigilant life ; a sudden clear padding of feet, an agitation of the bushes, a sharp cry, occasionally sounding distinct above a continuous undertone of vague commotion.

Tired as he was he felt no desire to sleep. He squatted down in front of his tent, put on a pipe, and waited for his uncle. Cartwright came at last, and greeted him cheerily, "Not turned in yet?"

"No—enjoying the night," Stephen said.

"Enjoying, eh?"

Cartwright sat down beside him. "I could do with a smoke too," he said, filling his own pipe. He lit up, then sat leaning forward with his hands folded round his knees. After a short silence he

said, "We used to talk like this in the old days, your father and I. The old days! Ye gods! With the moon up there, and the shadows, and the hills, enough to set a fellow dreaming!" He seemed as though about to launch into reminiscences, but turning suddenly to Stephen he asked, "Sure you hadn't better turn in?"

"Not in the least inclined," Stephen told him. "But what about you?"

"My tongue could do with an airing," Cartwright said. "Though I must admit my old heart's overstepping the limit of its seventy. But one must allow a margin of excitement."

"It might be wiser——" Stephen began.

"We'll leave wisdom to where it belongs," Cartwright interrupted him jauntily. He seemed to be in a strangely buoyant mood, not quite like anything that Stephen had ever known in him before. He puffed for a minute, and added, "To vegetables, principally. They're about the wisest things God's created. Just sit still, you know, and take whatever comes to them without any fuss. You can hardly picture a cabbage with the nightmare, or an artichoke with D.T. ! Imagine sending a mangel-wurzel to that madman Waters to be treated for acute neuritis ! These are the privileges of humanity, son. Brain-fever presupposes a brain, eh?"

"And remorse—a conscience," suggested Stephen, rising to his uncle's inexplicable good humour.

Cartwright slapped him on the knee. "And isn't that as comforting a thing as you could tell a

fellow ? ” he cried. “ The poor shall have the gospel preached to them ! Well, it’s good news to be assured that you’re a man. Tell some wretched grovelling brute that he’s got a conscience, and he jumps up on his hind legs again. Still with the mud on him, perhaps. Never quite wash that away. Never ! But the great thing is to stand up straight. That means you can see further, you know ; clear over the backs of the beasts. The beasts that perish, you remember ! Have visions ! . . . Of course, it lays you open too. No good kicking a man on the shin if he’s got a cork leg. Some things only appeal to flesh and blood ; some only to spirit. I suppose a man with a musical ear gets more torture than delight out of it. But that’s the patent of his nobility, I take it. . . . Yes, we used to sit and talk in the old days. . . . ”

Stephen found it difficult to fit any sort of precise and practical question into this curious loquacity. He looked at his uncle askance, puzzled to understand him, baffled by the moonlight from deciphering the emotions on his vague and pallid face. His features showed smooth and soft through the dim air, as though a transfiguring hand passing over them had charmed away the lines and furrows. And the man seemed actually happy, not with a placid contentment, but with a happiness of the spirit, exciting and perturbing. His hands clasping his knees were gripped tightly together. He puffed rapidly, his eyes set on vacancy.

“ I used to read the Bible,” he suddenly began again. “ But it sickened me. Repentance—forgiveness. That sort of thing. I tell you what, Steve ”—

he turned sharply from his distant gazing to look full into the boy's face—"there's no such thing. No such thing. Stands to reason—but you can work that out for yourself. A man can suffer; that's about all. And that's his glory. I've come to understand that. If anything could make me believe in a future life it would be man's capacity for suffering. Inexhaustible. Demands eternity. It isn't heaven that fills eternity, but hell. And if there is a heaven—well, dumping-ground for dead souls, I should say. . . . Do you want to be happy for ever?"

"I want to enjoy the sun."

Stephen answered as abruptly as the question had been put to him, not knowing precisely what his answer meant. Cartwright took him up as swiftly:

"Clarity—scrutiny. . . . Then you must steer clear of shame. A man's life writes itself line by line upon his face. It takes a saint—or a woman—to spend a day in front of a mirror. But then, a woman's busy hushing up the horrible truth! Enjoy the sun, eh? Wish you luck, boy. Most people prefer the twilight. More romantic. That means less uncompromising. Love gets made in the twilight—or the moonlight. Everything looks better behind a veil. When you come to marry. . . . But you want the sun, eh? You're ambitious, Steve. Of course, a hero or two gets born now and then, people who can endure the midday light. But most of us skulk in their shadows, peeping up to admire them. The sun. . . ."

Stephen felt a strange resentment against his

uncle for involving his simple words in such an exaggerated interpretation. He wanted to put an end to this pointless and troublesome talk which, like the moonlight about them, perturbed him with a deceptive and obscuring transparency. There was an elusive meaning in it somewhere, tantalizing enough to keep him questioningly on its trail, but changing shape as he touched at it, or confronting him suddenly with a mocking grimace to melt away into a haze of shadows. Was his uncle talking of himself, or of Stephen? "Then you must steer clear of shame. . . ." That sort of thing. He wanted to bring the conversation to the business in hand : Laura, those following savages, their plans for the morrow. But how to introduce it? And Cartwright had started again :

"A fellow feels so sure of himself—till the moment comes. People talk of a personal Devil. Well, I'd rather undertake to establish the existence of a personal Devil than a personal God. A sure and subtle brute with a spite on him like a shark's tooth. You can get a glimpse any day of his horns and tail. I mean, the way he waits for you, catches you tripping. There's an Achilles' heel in every man's morality. The trouble is, while you're polishing your helmet and putting an edge on your sword the Devil's got his eye on your boots. Always seems to know just when they're going to give out. Too late to bruise his head then. Call it Fatality if you like ; but spell it with a capital. And even then you've only changed a name. Or, the conspiracy of circumstances—sounds philosophic, mystic, but I don't know that it explains anything.

And the end's the same. . . . Steve, what are you most certain about in all your life ? ”

The unexpected question threw Stephen into a sudden confusion. If it had been asked him a fortnight ago he would have had his answer pat : “ Loyalty to Laura.” But he couldn't speak of loyalty now. It was as though his uncle had deliberately laid a trap for him—like that personal Devil he had been talking about. But the answer could be inverted. He said : “ Laura's loyalty.”

Cartwright sprang up as though the boy had struck him. For a minute he stood gazing down at Stephen without a word. Stephen could sense his agitation, but the dusky air was like a veil over his face ; a teasing veil like troubled water behind which the features seemed to shift and dissolve and recompose themselves in strange grimaces. Stephen started, staring fixedly at his uncle, alarmed at the illusion. “ What is it ? ” he asked. Cartwright moved away a pace or two, then returning steadied himself with a hand on Stephen's shoulder, and sat down slowly again at his side. “ Laura's loyalty ! ” he repeated. “ Yes, one can always be sure of the other fellow. Yet the other fellow's usually sure of you too—until you let him down. . . . But for yourself, Steve ; for yourself ? ”

“ I'm afraid I can't be sure of myself,” Stephen answered bitterly.

“ Lost faith already ? ” Cartwright asked. “ Well, of course, I know what you've got in mind. But I don't think you'll go wrong there again. Not in that particular way. A fellow doesn't repeat a mistake. But while he's steering clear on one side he

may fall in on the other. . . . Look here, old chap, isn't it part of the game out here that you've got to get your faith back? What do you think I've brought you for, eh? To pick bananas? Chew sugar-cane? Come now, I'm going to ask you a perfectly absurd question." Cartwright paused for a little, leaning towards Stephen, seeming to watch him intently through the filmy shadows. He continued: "In such a place as this, let us say; with your nerves unstrung; with these savages on your track, hiding it might be just there in the bush—could you play the coward? Could you get up and run?"

He spoke with a strange eagerness which troubled Stephen. With the obscuring night about him, under a moon which pretending to illumine confused and concealed by disguising the commonest things into disturbing distortions, with the air full of muffled noises, with the shadows shaping themselves in his imagination to dark and watchful forms alert and lurking. Stephen was ashamed to confess what he might do if fear took him by the throat.

Cartwright repeated his question: "Eh? Could you get up and run?"

"Why—if I were alone—I don't know——" he said hesitatingly, thinking of his uncle.

"But suppose it meant leaving Laura to it," Cartwright suggested.

"But uncle," Stephen cried, "the thing's preposterous!" He felt no hesitation now.

"Then you still do believe in yourself?" Cartwright asked. "Well, I told you I was going to ask you an absurd question. You haven't quite

lost faith? It's something to get that clear. You weren't so sure just now. But you'd stand by her to the end. Of course you would. I'd stake my life on it. You'd stand by me too, though that wouldn't benefit you much. Yet you know you would. That is, you know in theory, in imagination.—Let's leave Laura out of it. The sexual motive makes a man see red.—But you'd stand by me. That brings us to the pure idea. You can see yourself nobly dying, if need be, giving your life, your youth—giving up the sun, eh?—for me; for an idea, that is, for an ideal, an abstraction—Loyalty! . . . Look here, boy, is it worth it?"

Cartwright laid a hand softly on Stephen's knee. The touch startled him, settling furtively upon him like some creature out of the dark. "I can't for the life of me see what you're getting at, uncle," he said, embarrassed with a growing perturbation.

Cartwright withdrew his hand, breathing deeply.

"Why, I mean," he said, "that you'll soon have a chance of putting it to the test."

"You mean there's danger?" Stephen asked.

"Everything's against us," Cartwright told him with a curious triumph in his voice. "Listen now."

"Laura may be awake," Stephen interrupted.

"Won't frighten Laura," Cartwright continued, without lowering his voice. "Now listen. We've a day's march ahead of us at the lowest estimate. And you can guess at the kind of road. Pretty dizzy, I can promise you, though you've got head enough for that, both of you. Still, it's an element. Then the boy's taken fright at meeting that party

to-day, and refuses to go another step. That means sharing out the kit between us. We can leave the tents behind and risk the rain, but we must take grub, several days' grub ; no knowing how we may get hung up. We may lose our way without a guide—twenty years, remember, since I was here last. The weather may be against us. Anything. Then lastly, the savages. The folk here are in the deuce of a state. They're full of rumours. Quarrels, disturbances, tiffs with the police. Nothing clear, but it means unsettlement. These people breaking bounds to-day confirms that. They get taken with a vague unrest ; don't know what they want ; but now they've spotted us they may find an outlet. Pleasant situation, eh ? A little more in it than you thought when you took to dropping behind. Of course, the police are spreading their net out to save us, but I reckon we've thrown them off the track. Then, you know—may as well have the whole story—my heart's misfiring a bit. Put the possibility that I collapse—on one of those mountain tracks—what then ? Bit of a lump to carry. And with the head-hunters complicating things ! . . . But we've got one revolver ! ”

“ Look here, uncle, are you mad ? ” Stephen exclaimed. “ You tell me all this as though it's a joke. It might be, if Laura weren't involved. But——.”

“ Too late to turn back, old chap,” Cartwright said kindly. “ Laura wouldn't consider it for a moment.”

“ Have you been telling her things ? ” Stephen asked.

"No more than I've told you," Cartwright assured him. "But ask Laura to turn back. See what she says. Why, what do you think she's come for? What have you come for yourself? If you turn back now, doesn't that spell separation, the end of everything?"

"No, I'm damned if it does," Stephen cried.

"Then you don't understand your Laura yet," Cartwright said. He began to refill his pipe.

The suggestion behind the action exasperated Stephen. "I want to get this clear," he tried to bring his uncle to an explanation. "You ask me what I've come for. I've just begun to ask myself the same question; and if you can't answer me, who can? You brought us, didn't you?"

"Why, certainly," Cartwright admitted. "But what's the matter, old chap? You were keen enough—when was it?—three weeks ago."

"Three weeks ago? An age ago!" Stephen exclaimed. "The whole world's changed since then."

"Precisely!" Cartwright cut in. "And if we'd come three weeks ago I've an idea we should have missed all this jolly excitement. Which would have been a pity. There's a special Providence in the fall of a sparrow, you know. We needed a changed world to give value to the thing. I didn't see it then, mind you; but, by Jove, now!"

"Jolly excitement, you call it!" Stephen fumed. "Do you remember those cards Gregory showed us? What was the fellow's name?—Patala, wasn't it? And skulls and things."

"Patala; quite right," Cartwright said. "So

you keep him in mind, do you? I dare say we shall come across him. And as for the skulls and things. . . . Quite romantic seeing rows of skulls on a head-hunter's shelves, while you're looking at a picture—price two sen! But it's different, isn't it, when you get to seeing your own skull there; or Laura's, shall we say? But doesn't that all fit in with the changed world, as you call it? . . . Look here, boy," Cartwright spoke more gently, "there's more in this than I ever dreamed of. Perhaps that's why I'm so excited to-night. Feel almost my old self again. There's something way yonder, over that black ridge there, which I've got to show you. Show you, not merely talk about. But I've known that from the beginning. What I didn't know was that it's to mean salvation for us. Salvation—I can't put it clearer. We've always been pilgrims, haven't we? But the pilgrimage I had in mind was something far different. I tell you, now that I know—if I do know. . . . But a pilgrimage presupposes danger, doesn't it? Neck or nothing—literally, in a place like this! And everything's against us! What could one ask for more?" He had grown excited again. He seemed deliberately to rein himself back to quietude. "You've proved yourself already, you'll tell me. For instance, you'll stand up to an elephant, shall we say? And Laura knows it. But then, you can trust your aim. But can you trust your aim here—where there's nothing to aim at? All shadow, bewilderment! Spiritual courage and physical courage aren't born twins. It's spiritual courage you'll need. Laura too. And you know

what's at stake between you. Not merely love, though that's an almighty business. But for you two, to go wandering apart—what's the world got to offer? Man does not live by bread alone. Mere life's not worth the taking. It must be life exalted, transfigured. Man's job isn't to mechanize the world into comfort, organize it into security, but to illuminate it with a new glory. Your father and I, we had our friendship. You have your love. I dare say anything will do—even to baseball and business. Still, I should say love's the highest. Well, you have it, haven't you? And you want to turn back! . . . Good God, Stephen! . . . I turned back, didn't I? Isn't that warning enough?"

His speech had risen to a feverish declamation in spite of himself. He was staring intently close into Stephen's eyes. He drew back with an exclamation of annoyance. "And now my pipe's gone out!" he said. "Another case of Providence, I dare say. I think we'd better turn in." He rose, and without another word pushed under the flap of the tent.

Stephen was left alone, with the moon looking full upon him, ringed blackly in with shadows. With the ceasing of his uncle's voice the uneasy noises of the night asserted themselves in his consciousness again. He knew he couldn't sleep for the turmoil in his spirit. He peeped into Laura's tent, wondering whether she had been awake all this time. The moonlight flooding in showed her serenely sleeping. Cartwright in the other tent was silent too, as though he had merely to lay his

head on the pillow to fall asleep. Even that man, usually so restlessly tormented ! But under the power of his strange exaltation he seemed miraculously to have thrown off his distress—thrown it off to let it fall on Stephen ! . . . If only he could get things clear ! But one thing was clear—though he couldn't say why : there could be no turning back.

He joined his uncle in the tent.

CHAPTER XII

TIREDFNESS overcame him, and he slept ; but some while later he found himself wide awake again. The last of some disturbing dream seemed to vanish like a fleeing animal round a corner. He couldn't recall it, though for a little he lay perfectly still, his mind reaching out towards it. It had gone, but it didn't matter. A dream only. . . . His uncle was fast asleep. Stephen felt a foolish annoyance with the man for being able to sleep so peacefully when he himself was so utterly awake. . . . He lifted the flap of the tent and looked out into the moonlight. The moon had passed overhead, and the shadow of a tall tree lay across the clearing like a bridge of darkness over a luminous pool linking the islanded tents to the encircling black shore of the bush. A path along which a man might creep unseen ! There was a fascination in it. He felt a sudden temptation to crawl out along it, to lose himself in the further shadows, as a man feels tempted to lose himself in the midnight sea. But it was his imagination only that felt the spell, not his activity. He lay with his body idle letting his spirit drift into the darkness. . . . Then with eyes suddenly wide and with pulses throbbing he started up on to his hands, gazing along the strip of black. Something was moving there, at the far end, almost indistinguishable

against the bushes. He thought he heard a rustling too, a distinct sharp snapping, above the general murmur of the night. But the moving thing had gone, gone like his dream. Only a confused shadow, and here and there a flurry of wings, and a patter of animal feet.

If he had known where to lay his hand on his uncle's revolver ! But fists would do in the darkness. Under the urge of a compelling excitement he crept out of the tent, dragging himself slowly along the dark bridge, with infinite caution, as though a slip to either side would precipitate him into an abyss below. He didn't know what he intended to do. Merely he was on the trail of that thing he had seen stirring. He knew what it was too, remembering that Laura had counted. . . . As he came up to the bushes he paused, balancing himself on his feet so as to have his hands free, his fingers open like claws ready to grip. With an effort he remembered he was a man, and closed his fists. He waited for a little, momentarily expecting the fellow to spring. But he could see nothing except the bushes, free of their alarming disguise now that he was close to them. But behind ? He crept softly forward again with an alert eye to either side. Immediately the earth was damp to his hands. Drops of shaken moisture fell on his hair and neck. A great leaf slapped wetly against his face. . . . And now which way to take ? He halted, uncertain. He realized his teeth were set, his lips drawn. He recomposed his features, telling himself that this affair had got to be conducted with reason, with control. . . . Then deeper in among the shadows

he caught the rustling again. Quietly putting the shoots aside he crept towards the sound, letting them back gently behind him, steadying his breathing, pausing to listen. It came again, but no nearer. The excitement of the chase began to possess him. He started to circumvent the bole of a tree ; another bole. He found himself straining against a curious resistance. No obstruction in front of him ; but putting his hand behind he felt his clothes caught in a drooping thorn-bush. Patiently he released himself ; moved on a little ; and was again taken by the thorns. Trying to push clear he shook down on his back a drenching rain. He unhooked the slender clinging branches one by one ; drew himself free at last. But now which direction to follow ? . . . He waited for the rustling to repeat itself. To one side of him this time ; quite distinctly. He slipped again into the shadows, feeling uncertainly among leaves and grasses, coming up short against an impenetrable thickness of branches, a tangle of obstructing growths, the buttressed trunks of trees, a network of climbing vines, of trailing creepers. Already his clothes were clinging clammily about him. Then for a moment he was suddenly in an open space, clear to the moon. He drew hastily back, became involved in a forest of fern-stalks beneath a gloom of roofing fronds. . . . He halted again to listen. He could hear nothing. He moved, and set some wild creature scurrying. He thought he heard a stirring behind him. He faced round swiftly amid a snapping of stalks and a patter of dew. For a long time he didn't dare to move,

feeling he had betrayed himself. The night seemed to fold about him while he waited, drawing in like a net. To his strained hearing the air became full of an uneasy agitation, shaken with dull echoes unresolvable and unlocatable. Somewhere an animal thumped. The dew from the ferns still dripped on to his neck, began to trickle down his back, round under his throat. . . . Then again the sound was behind him. . . . He was no longer the hunter ; he was the hunted. Noises broke out on all sides of him, and became swallowed into the silence. His ears were betraying him ; he could distinguish nothing ; he knew he was afraid.

His intention now was to return to the clearing. But in which direction to strike ? He tried to reason out his position. Where was the moon ? If he followed back along the shadows. But how to distinguish the shadows, buried in the bush ? He groped his way at random till he came upon a tree. He steadied himself to his feet, looking up at the great trunk to see which side lay in light. Then he dropped to his knees again trying to make a line for the tents. . . . A shuffling in front of him sent him circling. Impossible to take bearings. A clump of saplings confronted him like a wall. He edged to one side ; returned ; at last angrily headed his way through. Then he rested to listen. Surely he had betrayed himself now. Why didn't the fellow make an end of the thing ? Leap on him ? Come to grips ? He knew now just who it was on his trail. It was that chap who had smiled on them as they passed. More menace in a smile than in a frown. Any of the others would

have finished the job long before this. He wanted to stand up and shout, "Here I am!" And of course, he could shout if he wished; shout for help. In the last resort he might be driven to do so. Yet he suddenly knew that he wouldn't. All that bewildering talk of his uncle's was seething in his head. He hadn't any of it clear; but there was something about cowardice. He would rather crawl among the bushes all night than shout for help. He was angry. If only he could get his hands on that fellow! . . . He made no effort to conceal himself now. He no longer crawled. He pushed his way vigorously among the vegetation. A low throaty growling sounded at his feet. He launched a wild kick into the darkness. The growl sharpened into a snarl, and something moved stealthily away among the undergrowth. He tried to keep to a straight line, furious when compelled to turn aside. He felt a fierce joy at tearing himself through the thorns, at trampling down the grasses. The wet leaves brushed fresheningly against his face. But roots tripped him; creepers arrested him, involving him, as he struggled amongst them, in coils and loops. The heavy air became a burden on his lungs. He would rest, leaning against a tree, squatting on the earth, then would rise and push forward again, each time more bewildered, more exhausted. Suppose he lay down till the morning. . . . But that fellow was following him. He was damned if he would let him have his head! He would stand listening, peering into the gloom. Where was he? . . . Peering into the gloom. It was easy to trace a dusky outline crouched there.

Fascinated he would step slowly towards some imagined presence, knowing it quite well to be an illusion ; or would leap at it angrily, to turn about at the agitation of his own passage through the bushes to see the thing now behind him. If he had brought that revolver it would have been emptied long since. And yet of course the fellow was actually there—somewhere—but how to locate him ? How even to avoid him ? Would the morning never come ? A break in the trees showed him the moon still riding high. . . . He became conscious of a sense of faintness. It was alarming. If his strength failed him ! He moved more slowly, reserving his energy. At any moment the call might come. Was the fellow just wearing him down before leaping in to strike ? He felt strangely empty and exhausted. Something wrong with his eyes too. Waves of darkness seemed to flow over them shot through with dancing stars. He closed them for a little, resting them. Perhaps if he sat down. He found a tree, and settled himself in a hollow of roots. . . . A wild scream startled him from his drowse. Only the death-cry of some captured creature, but it alarmed him into awareness. Death was busy all around him, he knew ; a death that stalked and peered and waited. Should he call ? But no. . . . And then again the illusion. This time a face. Three paces away, perhaps, across an opening in the bushes, he could see a face. He passed his hand over his eyes, but the face was still there, framed indistinctly in the shadows. A white face. It was Laura. . . .

He spoke her name, stepping quickly towards her.

He expected her to dissolve at his touch into leaves and branches. But it was really Laura. "You!" she exclaimed. "Why, what a noise you've been making!"

He felt ready to burst into tears, but he steadied himself. "I thought I heard someone," he said, "so I came to see."

She took him by the hand and drew him through a cluster of ferns. He found himself in the clearing again, almost at the point where he had entered it. The shadow of the tree, bridging the moonlight, still lay upon the tents. He broke into an uncertain laugh, and seizing Laura in his arms kissed her wildly. She disengaged herself, and sitting down on a mound at a short remove from the edge of the bush said, "We may as well get this clear before we turn in."

Stephen threw himself down on the ground beside her. "Anything you wish," he exclaimed hysterically. "But I feel much more like dancing the hornpipe or letting off fireworks. But that would be setting a bad example to the unspoilt children of nature. They might think we were insulting the moon which would be upsetting to their morals. Excuse me, but I've been living rather a hectic life lately. Please carry on."

CHAPTER XIII

THE explanation was simple—up to a point. Laura had heard a noise outside her tent. Looking under the flap she had at first seen nothing, then she saw someone vanish into the bush. She had followed, but had wisely kept within touch of the clearing so as not to lose herself in the darkness, waiting till the unknown prowler should show himself, moving up and down as he kept circling and doubling on his path. “What a number-one joke!” Stephen cried, under the stress of a strange hilarity. “So we’ve been stalking each other for the last two hours!”

“For the last ten minutes,” Laura corrected him.

“Two hours, at least!” Stephen declared. But the shadow of the tree was against him, as Laura pointed out. “Well then,” he said, “it’s the second time in history that the moon’s stood still. Who says that the days of miracles are over? I shall have to write to *The Times* about it. It’s one’s duty to report this sort of thing for the edification of the devout and the confusion of the unbelieving. What do you say, Laura?”

She took no notice of his nonsense. She continued soberly to examine the mystery of their common error:

“I’m sure I saw somebody—but it may have been

you. You're sure you saw somebody—but it may have been me. But we couldn't have both seen each other. There's still someone hiding there."

"Come along then," Stephen cried, half rising, "let's go and rout him out. It's lovely in there, I promise you. And when we catch him we'll off with his head. Do to start our collection with. Must take a skull or two home from Formosa!"

"Have you been drinking?" Laura asked him.

"Mugfuls of moonlight," he said. "Nothing to touch it. Fermented essence of nightmare. The man who learns to bottle it will make a fortune. Old brandy? May as well offer a fellow barley-water. I'll design a jolly old label for him. 'Moonlight! Taiwan Brand! Raises the Dead!' With skeletons dancing round a red old devil drumming with a skull and cross-bones. 'Judgment-Day Cocktail! Your young men shall see visions and your old men shall dream dreams!'"

"It certainly has a curious effect," said Laura.

"Result of mixed drinks," Stephen exclaimed. "Your father's been doping me with wisdom half the night. Philosophy of a ripe mind sort of thing. Over-ripe! Came dropping from his lips like mulberries. Deuced if I know what he was getting at. Ran on like a clock that's lost its pendulum. *Bzzzzzzzz!* That and moonlight. . . ."

"What's the matter with you, Stephen?" Laura asked with concern, laying a hand on his shoulder.

"Matter?" he cried, with a sudden constriction at the throat. "I could weep bucketfuls," he tried to keep a grip on his humour. "I'm all

torn to pieces and plastered up with mud, and it hurts. Nature hasn't any idea of putting on a bandage. Not the sort of nature you find in there, at any rate. And if you want a balm for hurt minds—turn your lunatics adrift there; they'd come out as mild as cows."

"I wonder how it was for father," said Laura.

"Look here," Stephen exclaimed, "we've got to see this business through to an end. Uncle's persuaded me of that."

"Was there ever any doubt of it?" Laura asked.

"Well, *I* had doubts," Stephen admitted. "It's about the maddest affair anybody could embark on, if you only knew. I can't reason straight about it. I can't reason straight about anything to-night. I was talking about cows just now, wasn't I? How on earth did they stray into the conversation? Sub-conscious hankering for a drop of fresh milk, I suppose. That's what Waters would say, and put it down to malnutrition in infancy. . . . Laura, isn't this world about as stupid a puzzle as you could give a child for a birthday present?"

"A puzzle," Laura consented; "but not stupid."

"Do you know, I believe you've still got your eyes open for that fellow hiding in there," he went off at a tangent. "What did you hope to do to him anyway? Convict him of sin?"

Laura showed him a hunting-knife at her belt.

"Gee!" Stephen exclaimed, "you came prepared, didn't you? I'm the only one who thought we were out for a picnic. Haven't brought a blessed thing—except a safety razor! Might

take off a scalp, perhaps, if the fellow sat very still. But I rather think you may need it—unless I confiscate it for myself. . . . And you really mean you were going to let him have it ? ”

“ I didn’t know what it might come to,” she told him.

“ Talking of mother’s milk—reminds one of heritage,” Stephen said. “ We’ve sucked in some funny stuff in our lives, or we wouldn’t be squatting here under the moon—in the middle of Formosa, eh ?—babbling rot, while that beastly fellow keeps his eyes on us from the darkness there.”

“ Then suppose we talk sense,” Laura suggested.

“ The most disturbing stuff in the world for unsettled nerves,” Stephen retorted.

“ Or go back to bed.”

“ Yes, to sweet dreams, while that beastly fellow. . . . Laura,” he caught her by the knees, “ suppose we pack up to-morrow and quit.”

“ Say that to me in the daylight,” she answered quietly.

He fell back from her feeling strangely powerless. His hysteria seemed to ebb from him leaving him nerveless and exhausted. He returned to the realization of his surroundings : the clearing open to the moon, the encircling shadows, the uncertain noises of the night. His bruises were aching, his wounds stiffening, chafed by the damp contact of his clothes. And there was a vague danger menacing him, menacing, Laura. Yet was there really any danger ? If that fellow meant mischief he would have struck long ago. He began to disbelieve in the fellow altogether. “ It’s because you told

me you had counted," he started to think aloud.

"I've been watching," Laura said.

"You mean while I've been babbling?" he asked.

"You've certainly talked your fair share of rot," she said.

"Probably," he admitted. "I feel like a bottle of soda-water with the gas let out."

She answered the emotion beneath the flippancy : "Then you'll have to pull yourself together, Steve. You know what's at stake. When I think of our love in danger I feel like a tigress robbed of its cubs. And nobody's going to rob me ; not even you. I need you just as I need air. And you need me ; it's not entirely one-sided, old boy. I've an idea that we're going to find each other in the mountains over there. And if we don't—excuse me being melodramatic—but that's why I've brought my knife."

Her steady speech shamed him. "But, Laura," he said, "you talk as though you doubt me. Do you doubt me?"

"Don't you doubt yourself?" she retorted.

"My God, Laura!" he muttered, "you make a fellow feel a worm."

She didn't seem inclined to spare him :

"Some people can laugh in the face of danger ; but there are different ways of laughing."

They were quiet for a little. Stephen was fighting down a sense of resentment against Laura. She was unjust. She didn't understand. . . . But she did understand. Somehow she could see clearly where to him everything was shifting and confused. He struggled back to good humour.

"Very well," he said lightly, "we'll reserve the laughter till it's all over. Meanwhile, set teeth and a long face. Take them for our coat of arms if you like."

She seized his hands, crushing them in her own. "Can't you see," she cried with a plaintive vehemence, "how utterly it all depends on you? I'm dreadfully weak . . . dreadfully weak. . . ."

The confession amazed him. He was immediately beside her, with his arms about her, passionately speaking her name :

"You . . . weak . . . and you tell me not to laugh !"

She yielded to his embrace. Then suddenly gripping him by the shoulders she whispered, "Look ! . . . There he is ! . . . There !"

In the shadow of the tree, not three yards away, at the point where he had entered the bush, Stephen saw a dusky form squatting.

CHAPTER XIV

THE fellow, whoever he was, must have noticed their eyes on him. "*Komban wa!*" he greeted them in Japanese. They rose and approached him, Stephen putting himself in front of Laura. He smiled broadly up at them, nodded his head, and invited them to be seated: "*O kake nasai.*" Stephen's surmise was correct after all. This was the savage who had smiled at them as they had passed.

He looked harmless enough just now. He was smoking at an uncouth pipe. He unslung a pouch from somewhere under his fur tunic and offered Stephen some tobacco. Stephen accepted, mechanically drawing out his own pipe and filling up, his eyes all the time alertly on the man. The tobacco felt coarse to his touch, stringy, like some fibrous growth; but it smelt good. His matches were too wet to strike. The savage handed him his own box: "*Dōzo, dōzo!*" Stephen took it, laughing, feeling more at his ease. To be offered a sophisticated match by a head-hunter! He lit up; puffed a little to savour the brand—it was rather strong, but with a fragrance in it—and returned the box: "*Arigatō gozaimash'ta!*" It seemed that if they were to communicate at all it must be in Japanese.

The savage again invited them to sit down. They did so, facing him, intrigued but uncertain.

In the darkness he looked like a great frog. His smile widened across his face with the fixity of a mask. Except for occasional nods of the head his body was motionless. He was squatting on his heels, they could see now, a position from which he could at an instant leap to his feet. But probably that meant nothing ; merely his customary pose.

It was difficult to know what to say to him. Stephen intended to take a severe line, but somehow found himself embarked on the polite Japanese interrogatories : " What is your honourable name ? How many are your honourable years ? " and so forth. His name was Lobu ; his age twenty-seven. Stephen and Laura reciprocated. At every answer Lobu's smile grew wider, his nod more vigorous. It would be difficult to imagine anyone more naïvely amiable and conciliatory. Then at last Stephen put the question, " Why have you not gone forward with your friends ? "

" The *seiōjin* do not often come here," he said. " And they please me very much."

" That is why you sit here and watch ? " Stephen asked.

But Lobu had his own thought to follow :

" But our masters hide you from us. We are *yabanjin*, and our legs are shamelessly uncovered. Yet sometimes the white men will come to see us, where it is permitted, and peep into our huts and laugh and pay us money. So when suddenly we meet you in the forest it was like an appearance of spirits. My friends—perhaps a little afraid, I think. But for me, it pleases me very much."

He spoke almost in a breath, concluding as a ways with nods and smiles.

"And your country, is it far from here?" Stephen asked him.

"Not far. Over the hills. You reach it before the sun goes in."

"A day's march," commented Stephen. "Then why do you come so far from home?"

"Surely we sometimes ask, 'What is there beyond the hills?' as the white men ask, 'What is there beyond the seas?' I have seen white men; I have spoken to them. They do not sit still. They come to see the *yabanjin* because—because they have enquiring minds, and the world is very little. . . . Also they like gold."

Stephen laughed: "Yes, white men like gold. But we have not come for gold, Lobu."

"Yet I could show you where to find gold," Lobu said. "Our masters do not know though they would like to know. I could show you."

"But we have not come for gold," Stephen repeated.

"Excuse my rudeness, but in your country do men fight one another for gold?" Lobu asked.

"Not fight," said Stephen. "But they—they work."

"Here they fight, I think."

A sudden suspicion crossed Stephen's mind. "Have white men come to your country before now?" he asked.

"Perhaps in ten years they come; but the *junsa* come with them carrying guns. Yet sometimes they come alone. Then they disappear."

"Why do they disappear?"

"Surely the spirit that watches the gold devours them."

"Yet it is not only white men who disappear," Stephen pressed him.

"The others," Lobu frankly admitted, "we keep their heads."

"But the heads of white men?"

"The heads of white men! Never! It would not be good to touch the head of a white man. The white man is already a spirit, I think. It is better for him to disappear."

Lobu's crude and childish candour was more sinister than an open threat. The air was growing darker, too, as the moon fell lower, and Lobu's dusky form showed so vaguely against the shadows that his voice seemed like the voice of the bush itself. Yet always they could see his smile, amiable and immense, as though life to him were a transparent veil through which he could see the amusing play of some puppet comedy beyond. Because Stephen sensed the philosopher in this grinning savage. He had, to use his own expression, "an enquiring mind." The others had gone forward, "perhaps a little afraid," but he had stayed behind to watch. And calling to mind what he had seen that night Stephen could divine something of the savage's perplexity at the strange ways of white men.

"Have you waited here—long?" Stephen asked him.

He seemed to know what the question implied.

"First I saw the woman, and then I saw the

man," he answered. "I wished to see inside the little houses"—he indicated the tents—"but the woman came out and I ran away. Perhaps I made a noise?"

"Yes, you made a noise," Laura told him.

"So I waited behind the bush here. Then this honourable gentleman appeared. He made a great noise. Is your honour a hunter?"

"Yes, a hunter," Stephen answered shortly.

"You have strange ways of hunting which I do not understand," Lobu said. "When I hunt, the bushes do not tell where I am hidden."

"Yet I heard you to-night," Laura challenged him.

"To-night I was not hunting," he replied.

"Only I wished to see. And I was careless, because I have been told that white men sleep at night. Do you not also sleep?"

"We sleep when our spirits are at peace," said Stephen.

"But to-night your spirits are troubled?" Lobu asked. "When my spirit is troubled I say there is the shadow over me of something that follows, and I look behind. Yet sometimes it is the shadow of something that walks ahead. Then, unless you have a brave heart, it is well to lie still and wait. But you have a brave heart, I think?"

"Certainly it is not my intention to lie still and wait," Stephen answered.

"Nor to turn back," Lobu continued. "Because, why are you here without the guns of the *junsu* to guard you?"

Turn back! The chance clear echo of Cartwright's vague talk troubled Stephen. What was

Lobu after ? What did he know ? Had he any purpose other than a primitive curiosity in spying upon them like this ? In fact, who was he ? ”

“ Do you know Patala ? ” Stephen suddenly asked.

“ My master whom I follow,” Lobu said with reverence. “ Since a child I follow him. He is a great spirit, I think. What he tells me to do, that I do. If he said ‘ Die ! ’ I would die. If he says ‘ Kill ! ’ I kill. . . . Do you come to visit him ? ”

“ We have heard of him,” Stephen countered.

“ Surely the whole world has heard of him,” Lobu said simply.

“ And Patala also,” Laura asked, “ do white men please him very much ? ”

“ Not please, I think,” Lobu confessed.

“ Is that why they disappear in your country ? ”

“ Patala knows what he knows,” Lobu replied.

“ He is very wise. But he does not tell me, because I am foolish. The great spirits counsel him, I think. Yet sometimes he will condescend to talk to me of many things. But his words go over me like a deep water. Indeed, he is very wise. And when I say to him humbly, ‘ Master, where did you find wisdom ? ’ he answers, ‘ In great suffering, Lobu.’ I also as a child, I suffered too ; for a little while. But it did not make me wise. Yet some things I know which our people do not know, because my master has taught me. Some day I must rule his people, and he wishes me to rule them well. So he teaches me.”

“ What does he teach you, Lobu ? ” It was Laura still questioning him.

Lobu laughed : " That is what I can never remember. Surely I am very foolish. Yet I have a head ; and heads are a thin harvest since the *junsä* came. And my master says, ' The heads are good to have when the tongues are silent.' The *junsä* are not pleased with him, I think. But our people love him."

" And will your master welcome us," Stephen asked, " if he finds us in his country ? "

" How can I say ? " Lobu answered. " One white man he welcomes."

" Gregory san," said Stephen.

" You know Gregory san ? " Lobu asked. " Yes, he welcomes Gregory san. But when he brings some other foolish man with him who only wishes to look, and make pictures in a box, so that he can boast among his own people and say, ' This is a chief of the *yabanjin*,' then my master says to me, ' Lead these men by a quick path out of my country.' But Gregory san he loves, I think."

" Then your master is surely wise," said Stephen.

" He can read into the heart," Lobu continued. " What is in your heart I do not know. But Patala will know. You had better search well before you visit him. Yet I think you are not like the man with the box. . . . To-morrow I will lead you."

Stephen started, remembering his uncle's words, " without a guide." Providence was busy about them.

" You will lead us ? " he said.

" Surely I will lead you."

" But perhaps we do not wish to meet Patala.

I do not know. We also have a master we must follow. But in the morning I will ask him."

"Then you must sleep," Lobu said. "It is a steep path. And this night you have not rested well."

"And you?" Stephen asked.

"I will sit here and wait for the sun."

The cousins rose. Lobu sprang quickly to his feet bidding them good night: "*O yasumi nasai.*" Half the clearing was in shadow now. As they reached their tents and looked back Lobu was already invisible against the night, but the glow of his pipe still showed like a vigilant red eye. They separated, entering their own tents. Cartwright didn't seem to have moved since Stephen left him; and for his own part, feeling half perplexed and half assured under the consciousness of Lobu on guard there in the darkness, the boy was almost immediately asleep.

PART IV

CHAPTER XV

THE next morning at a brusque shaking from Laura, Stephen came slowly to awareness, but once awake he was quickly out of his tent, though feeling somewhat unsteady and uncertain. Some high clouds overhead were already alight with colour ; but the sun had not yet mounted above the ridge beyond the valley, and the morning lay over the world grey and sobering. The mist lying across the hills in level white sheets islanded the peaks and summits. A drifting waif of it floating by insinuated itself about Stephen's body with a touch furtive and chill. He was glad to see breakfast already steaming.

Cartwright must have made acquaintance with Lobu without the aid of an intermediary. During breakfast Lobu was set to pack the kit. "Leave the tents," Cartwright ordered him, "but pack the bedding. Can't pitch a tent against a wall," he explained to the cousins. "What we want here is a spider's web. But how do you like the looks of our new guide ? "

Stephen glanced guiltily at Laura. "I seem to recognize him," he said.

"Useful. Talks Japanese," Cartwright told them. "The Japs seem to have set up schools for the Noble Savage. Imposing their tawdry education like their tawdry goods all over the east. But

remember, it's quite on the books that he talks English too ; or at least understands it. Another Jap stunt that. The language of Shakespeare is proving itself an efficient shop-slang. Not likely that he understands, of course. Certainly he won't admit it. But if you want to discuss affairs of state you'd better drop into some other lingo. *Verb. sap!* The main thing is that he can take us where we want to go. Interesting chap too. We've had a good long talk together."

Cartwright's good humour of the night seemed to have suffered eclipse, partial if not total.

The tents were packed and stored in one of the huts. The boy from the lake promised to remain on guard till the party should return. "And remember," Cartwright warned him, "if the *junsas* ask questions you know nothing about us—unless meantime you hear rumours of us towards the north. But best to know nothing. They'll probably know you're lying. It's their own trade." The boy solemnly nodded comprehension : "*Yoku wakarimas*.'" But he beckoned Stephen to him, as Cartwright turned away, and taking him by the sleeve said earnestly, "If you go with that man it is not good. Lobu his name is. I know him. It is a bad sign to see him. And if you command me, in spite of what the Number-One says, I will bring the *junsas*."

"You must obey the Number-One," Stephen told him.

The boy bowed and was turning away, then as an afterthought added, "But you will be safe till you come to Patala."

Cartwright called to Stephen, and they set off. He couldn't resist a last warning to the boy. "Remember ; say no word !" adding irritably, " We're very fond of the *junsas*, bless their swords and pop-guns ! but we're not inviting them to this picnic." He called back more cheerfully, " What do you say, Stephen ? "

" They're certainly apt to be spoil-sports," Stephen answered lightly.

Cartwright laughed appreciatively. He was clearly in an uncertain mood.

They began to zigzag down the hill-side, under a sparse cover of trees. It was so much like a continuation of the march of the day before that Stephen found it difficult to believe in the happenings of the night. Once on the move again it was as though they had never halted. He felt perhaps a little heavy-headed. The sleep hadn't quite gone from his eyes. Also certain cuts and bruises assured him that that episode in the bush wasn't entirely hallucination. Besides, there was Lobu ahead, with their bundle of provisions and bedding at his back. But even these indisputable witnesses had a touch of the fantastic about them, as though a dream had come true as in some fabulous romance. There was still an element of unreality in the recollection of his uncle's garrulity, his talk with Laura, his talk with Lobu, as though his memory was deceived by the bewildering moonlight. As for his absurd adventure in the bush, it returned to him on a flush of shame. That was something to shut away for ever. But he tried to beat back through a tangle of half-remembered phrases to

what his uncle had said, to what Laura had said, and Lobu. It was something to busy his mind with during the silence of a long day's march. Yet even so the night remained in his memory as something disturbing, a little incredible, and yet with a meaning in it somewhere if only he could get at it, as though in an interlude between the acts of a play he had been admitted behind scenes to chat with the actors who, forgetting for a moment their simulated ignorance, had talked incomprehensibly of the end of the drama.

They dipped into a level of mist, and emerged beneath it. The sun was beginning to assert itself. Here and there a high pool of white vapour seemed to waver and break, and became sucked up suddenly into the sky as though through a funnel. By the time they reached the valley the hills were almost clear, the higher ridges already flushed towards the east.

They came to the river, surging violently along a sharp chasm among white granite boulders. Over it was slung a crude rope bridge. A single rope to walk on only, made of twisted creepers, with a rope for the hands to either side, the three ropes corded together by transverse ligatures into a kind of V-shaped hammock. It swayed as they crossed it. Lobu looked back, grinning, to see whether the white people would hesitate, but their training and experience had made them as sure-footed as born mountaineers. Lobu nodded and beamed appreciation.

At the other side the path began to slant up to the right. Before commencing the climb Lobu

pointed up the valley to the left, saying, "There is the police road. Do you see?" Far in the distance, spanning the valley high above the river, was a suspension bridge, like a single thread drawn taut across the gulf. It might have been five miles away, ten miles, impossible to estimate. "But the road goes always farther; always farther," Lobu said. "This is the last time that we see it." They began to climb the path.

It was a narrow track, cutting at a gentle gradient up the valley-side, not in a zigzag, but edging always to the right, growing dizzier as they rose. The mountain sloped steeply up above them, and the gorge fell abruptly away below. The scrub became thinner as they left the river, and the trees scarcer, clinging precariously with roots like claws gripped convulsively about the broken soil and the outcropping boulders. There were steeper bare spaces, falling almost sheer to the river, where the rock showed stained and discoloured, slate-grey, iron-red, slashed downwards and across into flat surfaces and sharp angles. The going never seemed safe here, as the cliff detached itself in slices from the mountain wall and loomed threateningly over the track. Here and there a face of it had fallen, carrying the path with it, leaving a loose drift of rubble to be crossed with circumspection. And there were more serious land-slides, cutting like scars down the mountain-side, filled with a waste of uprooted trees and stones and sand. There was no trace of a path here if the fall was recent, only footprints in the soft soil between the logs and boulders. Lobu in front stamped each foot firmly

into the earth before risking the next step. The others followed, crossing safely, but with boots filled with dust. In other places a sloping naked face of granite lay grey amid the shrub like a petrified glacier. Across it a slender track little more than a foot's width would be hacked, slippery with a loose covering of disintegrated sand. "Lean out," Cartwright warned them. They obeyed him, avoiding the temptation to steady themselves with a hand against the rock, though, looking down, the granite slide curving steeply inwards showed a clear edge against the gorge below. The path wound continually, circling about the spurs, and dipping into the gullies which bit deeply in between. Here the vegetation was denser, drinking at the trickling water that seeped from under the boulders and fell in threads and fans from rock to rock. Sometimes the track pushed through the tangled growth, clinging to the edge of the cliff; sometimes a rope bridge had been thrown across the gully, clear of the vegetation, or with the ferns drooping their fronds over it and the trees reaching up to it from below, so that the party in crossing sometimes found themselves wading through an enclosing sea of foliage, and sometimes balanced on a thread in the wide air with the gully cutting steeply away below them showing a moving white play of water over sharp rocks or a soft green cloud-world of leaves.

At last they reached the saddle in the ridge to which they had been slowly climbing. The sun was well up in the sky now, and scorched sharply at their hands and knees. But the air when a breeze

moved it was cool and fresh now that they had left the valley below them. It was a wonderful world they had come to, an ocean of brown-green ridges rolling away to an encircling purple distance. There was more colour here than in the lower levels. Azalea lay in crimson pools among the granite. A little scarlet flower dappled the shrub as though with bright spots of blood. Naked faces of hill-side lay brown and rose beneath the sky, or with sharp angles of rock taking the sun with a sudden glint of orange and red and purple. The mountains were still shaggily coated, but they had shaken themselves free of the suffocating forest below, lifting up tufted heads and furry shoulders above the strangling valley vegetation. Stephen and Laura felt happier here. The air invigorated them. There was prospect. Yet even here they were not free, forbidden from turning from the path by a wall and an abyss.

Not that there were no side tracks at all. But these led down to fishing pools or up to little clearings where occasional red-smocked natives, busied with their traps or their plantations, showed that they were still on friendly country. Yet those that they met on the way eyed Lobu suspiciously, in spite of his ingratiating smile, and shrank avoidingly away from him if they did not actually turn back till they could escape up some side path. But for the most part the way led directly on, skirting high along the mountain-side, now that they had crossed the ridge, following the further valley.

It was shortly after they had crossed the ridge

that Laura called Stephen's attention to a party of natives far in the distance moving ahead of them high up on the other side of the valley. At first he could not pick them out, looking for the familiar scarlet, then he caught them as they came more clearly into the open, minute brown specks following in file along an invisible track, showing like insects against the rock.

"Lobu's friends," said Laura.

"Certain?" Stephen asked.

"Well, I haven't counted them," Laura laughed. "But it seems likely, doesn't it?"

"Very," Stephen admitted, "though I don't know that they concern us very much."

He watched them as they appeared and vanished with the winding of the path, and eventually lost them altogether.

The sun beat full upon them now, though the later afternoon promised shade. They were glad of such shelter as the scant bushes afforded, if only to alleviate the radiation from the baking earth, intolerable where the granite pushed bare. Where a clump of trees overhung the path, or where the bluffs shouldered them from the sun, the momentary respite was like new life to them inhaled at every pore of the body. In the gullies they filled their hands from the ice-cold trickles of water that fell deep in shadow among the roots and stones, or from the little pools that gathered in the hollows of the rocks, bathing their faces and drinking. Yet the thought kept returning to them that this was preferable to the stifling forest. In spite of the heat it was stimulating, exhilarating. The slender ledge

crawling so dizzily above the gorge was like a challenge to keep the nerves alert and the muscles strung. No sleeping here.

At lunch, sheltered in a wooded gorge, Cartwright suddenly asked, "How would you like to make this at night, Stephen?"

"At night? Is it possible?" Stephen said.

"I did it," Cartwright told him. "Though it took me three nights. But then I was loaded. You understand." He dropped into French. "It's heavy stuff, gold. Also it was necessary not to be seen. During the day I was obliged to hide."

"Hide? Here?"

"Possible if you choose your place, and do a little climbing. But our beloved guide doesn't like us to talk French, eh?"

Certainly Lobu had ceased to smile.

Cartwright turned to him: "Do you often come this way, Lobu?"

His smile instantaneously widened: "Whenever my master sends me."

"And on what business did he send you this time?"

"Is it the custom among white men for a servant to talk of his master's business?"

"You speak nobly, Lobu, and my heart admits the rebuke," Cartwright said solemnly. "But all the same," he began again in French, "I think I know his master's business. Has it occurred to you that the police may have set the trap in trying to save us from it? When we didn't turn up that first night you may be sure their telegraphs were busy half over the island. And do you think that

our shrewd guide's shrewder master wouldn't soon discover that three foreigners were straying near his country? In fact, heading for it? And having an amiable and hospitable heart he despatches our friend here to speed us on the way. What do you think?"

"Knowing nothing of Patala——," Stephen began.

"Avoid names!" Cartwright cut sharply in.

"Knowing nothing of the great barbarian chief," Stephen corrected himself, "I can't divine his intentions. Do you think he has any particular motive for decoying foreigners into his territory?"

"They must be a rarity here, and also they have a knack of disappearing."

Stephen remembered the boy's words as they were leaving in the morning. They would be safe till they came to Patala. And it had been clear since Lobu's first appearance that he intended to deliver them to his master. But for what conceivable reason could Patala wish them harm, unless it was some obscure unreasoning fury against foreigners?

"Is it that our friend without a name still remembers that white men once carried away his gold?" he asked.

"I think we may assure ourselves that he remembers that," Cartwright answered. "Possibly he remembers more."

"Was he here—twenty years ago?"

"Yes—he was here."

The horrible thought came to Stephen that somewhere among Patala's collection of skulls

might be his father's head. Cartwright must have noticed the emotion in his face. "What's the matter, boy?" he asked.

"I was thinking," said Stephen, unable to express his gruesome fancy, "my father's head——."

Cartwright looked at him sharply. "You mean. . . . Ah! . . . Well, isn't that why we must meet Patala? He guards the secret. The secret. . . ."

"Is there a secret?" Stephen asked. He was sorry he hadn't let the matter rest, because Cartwright was showing signs of agitation, which emphasized his physical exhaustion, not particularly apparent until that moment. "But never mind. You're tired," he added quickly.

"Kind of you to notice it!" Cartwright grumbled. "But as for the secret, there's no need to create a mystery out of a single word. You can be sure that a man's dead, can't you, without knowing how he died, or when he died, or where he died, or? . . . But pardon me, Stephen, I had forgotten that I was talking about your father." He turned to Lobu: "We shall meet Patala, *né?*"

"Yes, we shall meet him," Lobu assured him.

"That's good," said Cartwright, speaking with a deliberate cheeriness. "Your master and I are old friends, you know, and we have a certain business to settle."

But Stephen found the contemplation of his uncle's talk confusing and disturbing. His eye lost its vigilance; he began to step unsteadily.

More than once he slipped. And his uncle had made this journey at night : over these treacherous land-slides, across these slopes of granite, these swaying bridges ! And Patala was awaiting them. He had sent Lobu to meet them, to make certain of their coming. But all that was mere wild guess-work. And yet. . . . It was madness to go on. With every step they were deeper in the snare. And for what ? For an idea, his uncle had said. An idea ! . . . At last the path dipped down to the river which it had been following all this way. "The Rubicon !" Cartwright said as they came to the bridge. "This is the beginning of Patala's country." He halted as though divining Stephen's thought, then moved on behind Lobu. Stephen followed without a word.

For an idea !

Sharply up over the next ridge with the sun dropping low. Plodding work as on the evening before. Stephen saw Laura step quickly forward and steady her father. He leaped up to support her seeing them sway unsteadily together, and called to Lobu to halt. Cartwright hung limp between them. They lowered him to the ground as well as they could on the narrow track, and waited till he should recover. "It's these steep places he can't manage," Laura said. "But he hasn't been right all the afternoon."

"I'm afraid I hadn't noticed it," said Stephen.

"You weren't just behind him," she replied.

But it wasn't that. . . .

Cartwright's predicament seemed more serious than on the previous evening. "We shall have to

carry him," Stephen said. Well, if his uncle had carried the gold—and at night. . . . Yet he stood looking down at him, feeling helpless, and Laura made no comment on his suggestion. Cartwright made an effort to rise, but sank back, muttering, "Touch of the sun ; that's all. Soon be fit."

It was Lobu who came to the rescue. "I take him," he said. He set off up the mountain with his bundle, stepping at a great pace, and was soon back, leaping like an animal, having deposited the kit at the summit. He picked Cartwright up like a child and slung him over his shoulders, first-aid fashion, and followed by Stephen and Laura began the ascent again. Once at the top there was no more climbing to do, and Cartwright, somewhat recovered, was able to walk with Stephen's support. But it was a tricky business on such a narrow path, with the light failing.

The valley below was loud with a turbulent river, wrestling strenuously among boulders. They followed above it, the path dropping gently towards it. The valley widened as they advanced, and eventually forked to either side of an abrupt ridge that projected into it like a promontory. The river swirled away down the farther channel, blocked from following the nearer channel by a saddle of rock that bridged the promontory to the ridge where the path lay. They seemed now to be striking down towards the saddle. Reaching it they found themselves looking over into a cup-like hollow, with the twilight heavy upon it, and already filling with mist. The cliff seemed to drop below them almost sheer, but a path showed

twisting precariously downwards, taking advantage of every jutting rock. The shrub had dwindled here to such weeds and grasses as could find nourishment in the thin soil in the crevices, too feeble to cling to. Stephen, still steadying Cartwright, felt a sudden alarm at the prospect of that descent. And once in the hollow the trap would have snapped to behind them. At least they might wait till the morning. He looked round to see if there were any possible place where they could sleep. . . . But Cartwright suddenly straightened himself. "All right now," he declared. "The last lap. Come !"

"Are you sure, father ?" Laura asked.

"Sure !" he cried. "Will versus body ! Move on, Lobu !"

They began the descent.

"If it were will versus nerve now . . ." Cartwright said. He seemed master of himself again, reinvigorated by his excitement. But Stephen was thinking of the way back, when the excitement, spending its force, would leave his uncle more exhausted than ever.

A little more than half-way down they came out upon a platform in the cliff heaped up with fallen boulders. "Ye Gods ! At last !" Cartwright cried, lifting his hands to the sky ; surprising Stephen into the realization that they had reached the end of their journey. But how wild and desolate a place ! Yet it was good to reach the end.

Cartwright pushed in front of Lobu, and began to tear at the shrubs which grew more thickly here clambering about the boulders. Suddenly he

vanished but almost immediately reappeared. "You, Lobu, light!" he exclaimed, waving vaguely towards the kit. Lobu threw his bundle down and began to unpack. Cartwright vanished again. Stephen following found himself shouldering through a narrow crevice between two rocks into a darkness beyond. "Light! I want a light!" his uncle was still calling from somewhere within. Stephen could hear him fumbling with his matches, unable to produce one in his excitement. "Damn it!" he shouted hysterically, "won't anybody bring me a light? Is this a plague of Egypt?"

Stephen struck a match.

Cartwright gave a cry, falling back upon Stephen, and sank gently to the ground. The match went out; but not before Stephen had seen, squatting against the dark rock wall beyond, the headless white bones of a skeleton.

CHAPTER XVI

L AURA came in with their travelling lantern alight. Between them they carried Cartwright into the open again. They restored him as well as they could, and settled him on a blanket ; then busied themselves with supper.

Supper over, they entered the cave once more. For a while they stood together before the skeleton. The meaning of it seemed so obvious that there was little need to speak. Laura drew close to Stephen. "Poor old boy !" she said. Stephen held the lantern nearer, examining the bones, as though they had some message for him. Laura urged him gently away. "Does it help—looking ?" she asked.

"Burial's a sane custom," Stephen replied. "If this is the end it's best hushed up. To think what he was, Laura ! And once he could give life !"

"It's our fault for trespassing into a grave," Laura said, again urging him from his contemplation.

"They might have spared his head," Stephen complained.

"No, no," Laura contradicted him. "You would never have been able to endure his picture again. Come now !"

But Stephen was inclined to linger. There was

a horrible fascination in that rigid and empty form shining whitely in the lantern light against the darkness of the cave. Laura left him alone there, and returned with a blanket which she threw over the skeleton. "That's quite enough," she said.

Stephen turned away. "Yes, it's best covered," he admitted. "If a fellow's got to come to that——."

"Moralizing won't help you," Laura cut in. "Besides, on that particular theme there's nothing new to be said."

"You're rather hard on a fellow, aren't you?" Stephen retorted. "You seem to forget what this—this—means to me."

"You don't know that it means anything," Laura answered. "And suppose it does, Stephen; you also forget that there are worse ends a man can come to. To die and be done with it isn't so bad as to linger on long after you're dead." He tried to interrupt her, but she brushed his words aside. "Suppose instead of—this—you had found your father alive, but degenerated, degraded—may as well speak plain—like my father. Would that have consoled you? Just think now!"

"Very well," Stephen admitted ungraciously. "But in a place like this—you might understand."

"Yes, I understand," she said more gently, letting a hand play softly down his arm. "But a man can't be his own physician."

They began to discuss plans for the night. The cave, even with its grim inhabitant shrouded from sight, wasn't particularly inviting, yet there might be danger in sleeping in the open. They

examined the interior more carefully. There seemed to be only the one narrow entrance. They discovered too that rightly it wasn't a cave at all, but merely a chance hollow among tumbled boulders, a larger cavity with angles and crannies which a man could wedge through, but leading nowhere. It wasn't too spacious, but if necessary it would serve them. They divined that in time past it had served Cartwright, though he was still too prostrated to inform them of their business there. Except for a light moss the walls were free of vegetation. The floor was covered with a drift of sand. There was a certain dampness about it, but that was inevitable in a place shut out from sunlight. There was ample room for the three of them if they decided to sleep there, and Lobu could sleep outside. But there might be other places. They examined the outer platform. Ample room there too if they could risk it. But otherwise there was nothing. There was no other opening in the boulders ; and below them was darkness, with a glimmer of water and a babel of frogs croaking.

Cartwright now was their main care. They had managed to get him to swallow some soup, and he had become vaguely conscious, but was not yet in a fit state to be bothered with questions. They sat down beside him. No need to turn in yet in any case, though the early night had already fallen dark about them. The fire at which they had cooked their supper still glowed redly on a grey bed of ashes, with a little flame or two licking fitfully up against a smoking black brand. Lobu had stacked a liberal supply of fuel close by as

though intending to keep a watch-fire burning. Stephen threw on a handful of smaller twigs. The flames subsided amid a shower of sparks, then leapt up with a sharp crackling. Their immediate world came suddenly into light, but the outer darkness closed them more blackly in behind an uncertain wall of shadow.

Lobu, supper cleared away, had lit his pipe, and he edged up to them now as though prepared to be sociable. Crouched on his heels and moving sideways, with his dusky limbs and tawny fur tunic he was like some licensed tamed animal. He offered Stephen another fill of his tobacco. Stephen accepted. There were many things he wished to understand, and Lobu might be able to enlighten him. For a little they smoked in silence.

"To-morrow does Patala come?" Stephen asked at last.

"*Saa!* To-morrow?" Lobu answered uncertainly. "He may be far from here, and I must find him."

"How is it that he is not here to meet us?" Laura questioned him.

"But how should he know of your honourable arrival?" Lobu parried.

"But did he not send you to meet us?" Laura pressed him.

"A woman's thought will pierce a thick shield." Lobu said.

"You do not answer my question, Lobu."

"A question unanswered is a question answered, lady. Your servant will not lie to you."

"So to-morrow you will go to find Patala,"

Stephen said. "But suppose we do not stay until he comes?"

"You will stay," Lobu told him.

"Yet it is a poor place for a guest."

Lobu ignored the implied question: "Because you have business with my master, is it not so?"

"Yes—business," Stephen answered shortly.

"It is here that my master does business with white men," Lobu said, as though returning to Stephen's earlier remark.

It brought forth no comment. Stephen's imagination was busy inside the cave. His uncle had spoken of a secret. Yet what could that skeleton reveal beyond what he already knew? And for twenty years it had remained there, squatting against the rock, silent, headless. Had it something to disclose now? A curious idea took form in Stephen's mind: to restore the head to the body and accord it decent burial. Yet Laura wouldn't have him brood over the thing; and of course Laura was right. . . . He tried to think of other matters. And there was plenty to concern him. His uncle's collapse, the coming of Patala, even their immediate situation. What a place was this! The fire isolated them in a void of darkness setting a ring of shadow about them. The light struck sharply on the rocks that walled them to one side, played suffusingly over a cluster of leaves that dipped down out of obscurity as though feeling for the comfort of the flames, flushed along a fibrous creeper or two whose curled ends like startled snakes seemed shrinking back for the dark, cut the sandy platform on which they squatted to

an abrupt edge against the immediate gulf of blackness beyond. The sky above, not yet feeling the moon, was set thick with stars, against which the hills outlined themselves in cones of eclipsing shadow. A trickle of invisible water sounded musically out of the night; and the frogs filled the air with a strident and relentless clamour.

Stephen and Laura regarded each other, and Cartwright uneasily asleep. They might have felt less alone if Lobu had not been there. He seemed to have intruded upon them as though to keep them disturbedly aware of that encircling world beyond the fire-light. His mere presence was a mockery and a menace. He was the savagery of the land made flesh, the more formidable for his everlasting smile. A crude and childish savagery, Stephen felt, but possibly the more ferocious for that. These people collected heads as a child might collect butterflies, ruthlessly and without spite. Yet it wasn't that. They didn't tamper with white heads, Lobu had told them. White men simply disappeared. Disappeared! And where more conveniently than here where Patala did business with white men? Stephen found himself speculating on what lay below them there where the frogs roared up to them out of the darkness.

Lobu launched into an epic of the old days "before the *Nihonjin* came." He told of feuds and battles, obscure with the names of unknown chieftains and Homeric lists of the dead. "We were a free and happy people," he said, "and we came and went wherever we would, and men

feared us. But now we must stay in our own land ; and it is forbidden us to take a head. Yet sometimes we take them, because it is our right, and for that our maidens love us, and for a maiden's love a man would burn his hand in the fire. Is it not so ? ” They nodded only so as not to interrupt him. Such talk as this even was better than silence. He began to speak of himself : “ I was the son of a great chief. Did you know that ? Yes, my father was a great chief, but he was killed in battle. And some day I also will be a great chief, because Patala teaches me. He is wiser than my father, but many things I do not understand. And I shall marry the Princess Peepee. Not yet, because she is still little, and I think Patala will not love me well when I take Peepee to my house. But some day I shall marry her. She is very beautiful, and many of our young men desire her. But I have shown her what they cannot show her. Already I have a head. Yes, from seven years I have had a head. I keep it safely where the *juns*a cannot find it. But you will not speak of it to the *juns*a, I think ; because you are not like the others whom the *juns*a guard with guns. Is it not so ? ”

“ We are not like the others,” Stephen admitted. “ But tell us of the head, Lobu.”

“ That was when I was little,” Lobu told him. “ My father was killed in battle, and I was in great danger. I hid myself in the hills. Many days I lay still while men searched for me. They passed me so close that I heard them speaking of me, but they could not find me. And at night I caught food. But that was not easy, and I became very

hungry. I learnt that my brothers were already killed, and my people were scattered without a chief. But they knew that I was still alive, and they would not submit. I suffered. I was only a little boy, and I suffered. I hid myself in the tops of trees, and in holes in the earth, and in bushes of thorns, yes, and in pools of mud where grasses grew. I caught birds and I caught fishes. I caught them with my hands, lying still and waiting for them, because I became like an animal in my hunger. I lay with my body covered over with sand, and the sun burnt me. I ate frogs, and I ate spiders. It would have been easier to die ; but I would not die. Yet I was alone, and my enemies were all around me. . . . But it is not well to speak of those days," he broke off under the stress of his growing emotion.

"Yet speak of them, Lobu, for our sake," Laura urged him.

"Then let me come to the end," he went on, "because it could not continue for ever. My heart began to lose its courage. The heart is often in the stomach. And when I was hungry and when I was thirsty I would creep out to eat and drink. Yet no one followed me. Then I became bolder, but my enemies seemed to have forgotten me. So I said I would find my people again. I already knew my country well, and I remembered that a quicker path lay through this valley. But it was a path my people did not use because of the mud which sometimes covers it and which will swallow a man. And it was a foolish path because at either end is a narrow door which a man may easily close.

But it was a quick path, and I yearned for my people, so I chose it. I came by the other door. That was in the morning. But in the mud I saw the marks of many feet, and I was afraid. All day I hid myself, yet I heard no one. But at night, when I thought to escape, there was a fire burning on the rocks above me, and I knew that the door was closed. And when I returned there was a fire burning at the door behind me. And all around me on the hills were little fires burning. Then I knew that I had been foolish, and had walked into the trap which my enemies had prepared for me."

Lobu paused for a minute to replenish the fire, as though his story had reminded him that the flames were low. The sudden light brought him out of the shadows which had slowly been engulfing him. The cousins were startled to see him smiling widely upon them, because he had been speaking with emotion. The swift suspicion came to Stephen that this was all a lie, a deliberate fable designed to enhance the uneasiness of their situation. But Lobu was speaking again :

"I tried to find a way up the mountains. But there is no way. Or if there is, it is not to be found in the dark. So I thought I must stay here through the night also, and through the nights and days that followed, until my enemies should make an end. And I wondered whether it would be better to lose myself in the mud which would hide me for ever. Because this is a place which puts fear into a man till the desire of death comes upon him. And so it might have been with me. . . .

But then I heard the sound of a man moving. He moved very softly, but my ears were not deceived. At first I thought it was an enemy come to find me. Then I knew that was foolish. In such a place as this no man would search for another man at night. Only a friend would be hiding there. So I signalled to him, croaking like a frog. He heard me, I think, because he became very silent. I croaked again, and moved towards him, but he moved swiftly away as though I had frightened him. I followed, telling myself that fear had made him foolish as at first it had made me foolish. And it was this way that we came, he in front and I behind. He began to climb, and I climbed after him, neither of us saying a word. But I had been so long alone that I dared not let him away from me. Then I came—where we are sitting now.”

He paused, and they waited for him to begin again. Cartwright stirred. Stephen glancing towards him saw his eyes wide with the fire shining on them. Was he also listening?

“Then I became uncertain. I did not know if the man were still climbing. I thought I could hear him, but listening it was only the fall of water that I could hear. And above me was a fire burning where my enemies waited. I said that this also was a trap. So I sat where I was, not knowing what to do. And again I wondered whether death would not be better. The drop is steep from where we are sitting, and if a man has the heart to leap he need never be taken. But the moon was beginning to rise, as it is rising now, and a great desire came over me to look upon the moon once again.

Then soon the night was not so dark, and looking about me I could see where the bushes had been moved aside, though they had been somewhat drawn together again so as to hide whatever there was to be hidden. So I crept through. It was very dark, and I could see nothing. But I crept through, feeling the stone against my shoulders. I came into the cave. . . . I did not know who might be hiding for me there. I waited, listening, but I could hear no sound. I signalled softly in friendly fashion, but still there was no sound. I moved inside, feeling against the rock with one hand, creeping slowly around the wall. Then something made me stop still. It was nothing that I could see ; it was nothing that I could hear. It was a feeling ; a feeling that comes to you in the dark when another man is near. The air was warm ; and there was a smell. Never before had I smelt such a smell. If it came from a man, it was a strange man whose race I did not know. My body became weak with terror. I carried a knife under my coat, but I could not strike. I felt as a dog must surely feel before its master. . . . When I raised my face I could see a little, because my eyes had become accustomed to the darkness. But the man was hidden from me, behind a corner of the rock. I had no courage to move round and look upon him. Nor did he move. . . . And then the cave became dark again. Another man was creeping through the door. I was confused, because of the two men I did not know which I had been following. And one might be an enemy, and one might be a friend. Yet the man of strange

race could not be a friend. And the one who came in now, why had he been hiding while I waited by the rocks outside? The moon must have shown me to him, yet he had not made himself known to me. And now he began to move slowly round as I had done, feeling against the wall with his hand. That much I could see against the brightness of the doorway; but no more. And soon he was nothing else but a shadow. He was coming towards me, but I could not avoid him because of the strange man. And he was coming towards me. . . .”

Lobu suddenly broke off from his narrative, addressing his audience sharply: “You, what would you have had me do? Have you ever known the fear of the dark? Only those who have known such fear as mine can understand. And I was only a boy. . . . But let me tell you. . . . Of a sudden there was a great light. Then a noise of men fighting. A great noise. Then a pain at my neck like a snake that stings; and a hotness at my head like a water going over me. . . . The rest I could not know. . . . But in the morning it was my own people who came seeking me in the cave. And it was Patala guarding me, having cared for my wound and nursed me during the night. . . . And the other man was dead.”

“The other man was dead!” Stephen repeated.

“He would have killed me,” Lobu said.

“No, never!” Stephen cried. “A boy——.”

“Patala said he would have killed me,” Lobu persisted, smiling more widely than ever. He relit his pipe at the fire.

Stephen was angry. It was a dramatic story, if

centred on Lobu. But for his father—an unworthy end ; altogether unworthy ! And the dreadful question suddenly came to him : Where was Cartwright ? Why was his father alone ?

“Your story is not clear, Lobu,” Laura said. “Where then were your enemies ? And who was the strange man ?”

“My enemies had already been scattered, though I did not know it. And how should I tell you who the strange man might be ?”

“And the fires you saw burning were the fires of your own people ?”

“The fires of my own people.”

Laura gazed out into the night, already whitening over the hills with the coming of the moon.

“I understand,” she said.

“But I was too young to rule,” Lobu continued, “so Patala became chief, because he had saved my life, and he was wise. . . . And the body we left in the cave, because the man was not of our people. But Patala would not take the head. So I took it ; and I keep it hidden where the *junsas* cannot find it. And when I marry Peepee——.”

“Lobu,” Stephen interrupted him, trying to speak calmly, “I will buy that head from you.”

Lobu looked questioningly across at Laura. “Is a white maiden satisfied with a head that has been bought ?” he asked.

Cartwright broke into a sharp hysterical laugh. “Funniest thing I’ve heard for a long time,” he exclaimed. “Funniest thing. . . .”

“Lobu, please tell us about Peepee,” Laura said calmly, laying a hand on her father’s shoulder.

"Who's Peepee?" Cartwright asked.

"The Princess."

"Are you all mad?" Cartwright cried, raising himself to his elbow. "What's the fellow been telling you?"

"I thought you were listening," Stephen said.

"Yes, I've been listening—to the frogs!" Cartwright answered testily. "What do you think they're raising that inferno for? Can't be bothered with yarns in a place like this. Yarns? Not from this fellow. It's another voice I hear. Another voice. . . . God! but I'm tired!"

"You haven't missed anything," Laura assured him.

Cartwright settled himself down again: "Buy a skull for your best girl, eh?" he began to chuckle a little. "Yes, I caught that much. Can't afford to miss a joke! But doesn't suit the ladies here, I take it. Too much like an artificial flower. Like it picked fresh from the stalk! . . . God! but I'm tired!"

He lay with his eyes wide, staring through the fire, and muttering vaguely to himself.

"Peepee," Laura reminded Lobu.

"Why, Peepee," Lobu replied, "I've told you already of Peepee. What more is there to say? A woman has no deeds. But you must ask Gregory san. He is very fond of Peepee, I think. He brings her toys which please her. And that also pleases Patala. But foolishness will find its way into the heart of every man, if not by one door then by another. For if a father is too gentle with his daughter she will not make a good wife."

"Is Patala—gentle?" Laura asked.

"He permits her to speak when a maiden should be silent, and to appear where no maiden should be seen," Lobu explained with a certain feeling.

Laura laughed. It was good, after such a story as they had heard, to sense a kindred humanity in these people. "Perhaps," she suggested, "that is why your master is also—gentle—with Gregory san?"

"Not so, I think," Lobu said. "We are all gentle with Gregory san. He has a heart that is full of kindness as a lake is full of water. But Peepee loves him best."

Peepee had accomplished Laura's purpose, assuaging the troubled atmosphere. She suggested now that they should sleep. "Inside or out?" Stephen asked.

Cartwright caught the question. "In there?" he exclaimed. "Never!"

They began to arrange their blankets on the sandy platform. Lobu lay down at a short remove, curling himself up against the rocks. The moon topped the rim of the enclosing hills, breaking suddenly upon them. "Look!" Stephen cried. Lobu glanced sharply round at him. "Speak in French," Laura warned him. "But I know already what you would say." Stephen controlled his emotion. "What a glorious moon!" he said in English. Lobu curled himself up again, while Stephen still gazed at the moon. But what he had really seen were points of red spaced around the hill-tops: the watch-fires of Lobu's people.

CHAPTER XVII

WHEN they woke in the morning Lobu had already gone. Cartwright seemed very weak and low, showing no inclination to stir from his blanket. Stephen and Laura set about preparing breakfast. They found that Lobu had filled their kettle and water-bottles before he had left. They soon had the smouldering fire in a flame, and breakfast was no difficult matter. After breakfast they had the day before them to examine their position while they awaited the coming of Patala.

Their immediate surroundings they could take in at a glance. They were lodged on a platform of rock which jutted from a wall of cliff like an eagle's eyrie. The mountains enclosed them precipitously in as though in a cup. A pool of water lay below them amid a waste of mud and grasses like sediment at the bottom, and above, encircling summits in a ragged rim detached themselves sharply against the sky.

Other particulars registered themselves more slowly. The descent from above continued to the pool in a series of steps and drops from ledge to ledge, appearing more dizzy by day than in the twilight. It twisted down the cliff and after a little disappeared under the bulge of the platform which leaning outward allowed a sheer drop into the mud. Almost immediately above them was

the gap by which they had come with the path edging up towards it, and beyond must be the river. But the gap was not deep enough, they remembered, for the river to pass over it, opposing it like a dam, and heading it off to the farther valley. Yet the inner wall here, dropping down to the pool, showed a smooth face of rock streaked black and green and iron-red. It was clear that in the rainy seasons the river brimming its banks flooded over into the pool. But now it had subsided, leaving the water below them to stagnate and evaporate. No wonder a man might be swallowed in such a deposit of mud.

At the far side of the hollow a way seemed to open between two overlapping spurs of hill. Somewhere hidden there must be the other door of which Lobu had spoken. Stephen decided to investigate that as soon as possible. Yet how to pass over the mud? He had no wish to vanish as other white men had vanished with whom Patala had done business in this place. He would need to skirt the margin of the muddy pool, hugging the base of the cliffs. The shrub grew more densely here, promising concealment as well as surer footing. And for the rest, the mountain wall closing them in loomed formidable and forbidding, fierce with sharp sheer faces of rock, shaggy with a sparse and precarious vegetation which struggled up the crevices and sprouted along the ledges, a barrier impossible to scale by day with the rim vigilant with enemies, and by night unthinkable.

Of course they knew they were in a trap. Stephen climbing to the top of the cliff found a couple of

savages on guard there. It seemed useless even to examine the other outlet. But Cartwright showed no immediate prospect of emerging from his prostration, so Stephen set off to investigate. Laura remained with her father. Stephen felt no anxiety at leaving her alone. They were both certain that for that day they need fear no molestation. But Laura told him not to linger out his journey in case Cartwright should require him.

He dropped quickly down the cliff-face and pushed through the shrub that ringed the pool. The going underfoot was reasonably firm. There seemed to be a little-frequented track half overgrown and not always distinguishable. He lost it and found it again, but the bushes impeded him. After an hour or so he came to the gap between the spurs. A river of mud brimmed it with a thin trickle of water threading down the middle, as though drained by an ebbing tide. If there were sentinels guarding the passage Stephen might come upon them at any moment. It would be better to remain unseen if possible, but he wanted to inspect the issue of the channel. The walling spurs sloped something less precipitously here, giving root-hold to a thick vegetation. Stephen climbed into the shelter of it, and keeping well above the mud worked his way cautiously round the bluff. And beyond, the mountains opened into a sudden abysmal gorge where a river plunged.

For a moment he stood still, peering between the trees, caught by the magnificence of the sight. But in its magnificence lay its menace. Impossible to scale those monstrous walls. Yet there must be

an outlet somewhere, because Lobu had come this way—from up the gorge, Stephen assumed—but choosing this track as a short cut. Clearly then the main path followed another route. He pushed on a little farther, and was arrested by a sound of voices below him. Looking cautiously down he saw a man squatting among the shrub, and with another couple of steps he could see a second man. He thought that was all. He had a clear view now of the passage they were guarding. The channel terminated abruptly above the gorge, bridged across with bare rock. Stephen could guess at the drop below. And to the hither side of it a path showed a step or two before it also vanished. It was a repetition of the entrance by which they had come. When the river above the pool flooded over, the pool once full would empty itself over the rock bridge which dammed the channel here into the gorge below. And it was probable that the descent to the gorge would be much the same as the descent to the pool. And it was closed.

Stephen surveyed the scene intently, registering its configuration on his memory. It was very simple. The gorge cut clear ahead of him. The bluff where he stood and the bluff opposite sheering steeply into it seemed to seal it at the hither end. The two bluffs as they fell away united into a single wall of cliff embayed towards the centre, where the path—guessed at only—worked its way down to the valley. The vegetation which sheltered Stephen dwindled and died out as the spur dipped over, but towards the river the slope became more gentle, and vegetation began again, following with varying

density down either bank of the stream. And the stream itself—so at least it appeared at first—broke through a gap in the right wall of the gorge ; but studying the configuration of the country more closely Stephen saw that there was really no gap at all. There was no discontinuation in either of the bounding ridges ; merely a distortion. The whole mass of mountain which ringed the pool belonged to the left ridge, growing from it like a hump ; and the right ridge curving back left the chasm clear between.

Stephen revised his first impressions. The gorge was not sealed as he had thought. It continued without a break, swerving merely in its course, and it was obviously up the gorge that the main route at which Lobu had hinted lay. Yet even so where did it lead ? Stephen crept up to the edge of the sheltering shrub, but could learn no more. It seemed likely that the river below was the same which they had crossed on the previous evening and which Cartwright had told them was the boundary of Patala's country. The Rubicon, he had named it. If so one had only to trace the river up as far as the bridge to strike their path of yesterday. The chance that they would ever need to go that way was extremely remote, yet Stephen found himself excitedly speculating on its practicability. One feature was in its favour : the river was well screened with trees. Once reached, the path, however rough it might be, would at least afford concealment. But Stephen felt one grave misgiving. If yesterday's river flowed at the same level as the river which passed above the pool there must

be a drop of at least two hundred feet somewhere in its course between the bridge and the gorge below. That might mean an insuperable obstacle. Because Stephen suddenly realized that what he had in mind was the feasibility of escaping this way with his uncle. With a rope of creepers it would be reasonably easy to lower him to the river, and once under cover they might make their way back to some friendly Tsuwo fisherman's hut. But if there were a two hundred foot ascent in the way escape would be impossible. Of course there was no reason why there should be such an ascent. He tried to remember the climb up from the bridge and the last drop down into the valley, estimating the heights ; but his mind at the time had been so concerned with his uncle's state that he could conclude nothing. Of a sudden he felt discouraged. In any case what was the use of bothering ? This might be quite another river ; and even if it were the same there was no way of reaching it except by that narrow guarded pass.

He set off back to report to Laura. The problem occupying him now was, should he resign himself to the situation, or should he persuade Laura to make a bid for freedom ? After all they had a revolver. Not that he meant to commit deliberate murder. In any case, to fire would be to bring the rest of the garrison on their track. But they could devise some scheme. Laura could keep the men covered while he crept round and knocked them quietly on the head. Something of that sort. There must be a way. And the rest they would risk. . . . It seemed the only sane thing to do.

It was that—or the mud ! . . . Yet would it be loyal to Cartwright to carry him away when he was too weak to resist ? He had some purpose in bringing them here, even if it were only to die. They had trusted him so far ; there was something distasteful, shameful, in the thought of failing him now. He remembered too that his uncle had deliberately put him on his mettle, as though foreseeing this. . . . But the mud ! To disappear in the mud ! And for what conceivable purpose ? For a scruple of conscience ! For an idea ! . . . He would speak to Laura and risk her scorn. . . . Then, why had his father been left alone in the cave ? The question came to him arrestingly, entirely without connection, as though the secret lay there. He didn't know what he intended to do. . . .

Cartwright decided for him. On reaching the platform Stephen found him sitting propped against the rock, looking haggard and unkempt, with his hair in disorder and a two days' beard on his chin, talking to Laura.

CHAPTER XVIII

STEPHEN stood for a little listening to his uncle, trying to pick up the thread of his discourse. But Cartwright seemed to be talking at random. Stephen questioned Laura with his eyes. She looked significantly at him, warning him not to interrupt, and nodded to him to be seated. He sat down. His uncle glanced at him without moving his head as though vaguely conscious of his presence, but did not address him nor ask him where he had been. Stephen was puzzled. Cartwright's words passed over him without purpose or coherence in a tone thin, irritable, and spiritless. Was he aware even of what he was saying? His body, supported against the rock, looked helpless and inert. His head drooped over his chest; his arms lay limp along the blanket which Laura must have spread beneath him; his legs stretched straight before him with the feet falling loosely apart. He seemed to be gradually subsiding, and would eventually be on his back without force to rise again. And his speech was at one with his attitude.

Just now as it happened he was talking of Lobu : "Honest sort of fellow, I suppose. Wish him joy of his Peepee ! It was Peepee, wasn't it? Fine idea of obedience. Shouldn't say he wishes us any

harm. Seems to have a tender spot in him for the white man. So I gathered by his talk. We had a good confab together—but I've told you. Possibly all bluff, of course. The tongue's a weapon the same as the fists. 'The white men are very wise,' he said. Not so wise as Patala, naturally. And Patala seems to have no use for them—for us. Lobu's obviously puzzled. He's got a great idea of our wisdom, but thinks it would be better if we disappeared. Accordingly we disappear! Laps all that up from Patala, of course. If Patala were out of the way Lobu would probably create us Prophets Extraordinary without more ado. You see what I mean. Another case of loyalty. Even in the mind of that savage there's the same old struggle going on. Can't escape from it. The chances are you'll find it in the opossum and the ornithorincus. Here we are neatly locked in—bottled in spirits, you might say—because Lobu must obey where he wishes to disobey."

Stephen found himself listening more intently. Disconnected as the talk was it seemed to harmonize curiously with his own meditations. Cartwright continued, chopping his phrases, a little out of breath :

"Locked in all right, you'll find. That black-guardly old head-hunter's got a grim sense of humour. Sort of Ali Baba story : locked in with the gold ! Down there under the mud—a treasure-house of it. We used to wonder how it got there, Spender and I. But the river brings it down, of course. Every flood. For centuries and centuries. Sinks into the mud. But you've got to dig for it.

We found that out. Had warning too. The map told us. You remember the map. That old Dutch boy must have had a nose on him. But no need to repeat all that."

"Please," Laura said.

"Want it again, eh?—God! I get talking! Why don't you shut me up between you? You've had the whole thing once, haven't you? Once? Seems to me you've had it every day of your life. When a chap gets the habit of confessing! Always tried to steer clear of that. Women's work and priest-craft! Good for the soul, they say. Tears of repentance! Yes, if the soul needed watering like a geranium. But we don't grow in pots, damn it! Heaven isn't a greenhouse! Yet I owed it to you to tell you. But again? So often? Why don't you get up and walk away? You could get through if you made up your minds to it. One can always outwit a savage. But why you want to sit here and gloat over a fellow I can't think. Won't you understand that Patala will soon be on you? Get up and go now. You can take the revolver. I didn't think you would need it, but there it is. I can find some other way. Calculated badly. Must have been mad, God knows! But I meant it for your good. . . ."

"I don't remember about the map," Laura said.

"Van Loon's map, you mean? Why, the fellow gave it us in 'Frisco. Couple of penniless vagabonds for all our dreams. But he put us on the trail. Must have spent half his life in the island, that fellow, or he'd never have come to put spade in

here. But it was different for him. Had a glass eye, and with a glass eye you could rule a continent of head-hunters. Think now, when he sees them coming he sits down and starts polishing his eye ; holds the thing up and lets it look at them ; pokes it at them out of the bushes. Can't you see them jump ? He advised us too, quite seriously, to dispense with an optic and leave our guns behind. Humorous old bounder. Called it tipping us a glass wink. ' Who's going to touch a man,' he said, ' who can sleep with one eye open ? ' Well, that was his magic, and it worked. I'm not sure that we weren't fools not to obey him. But we thought our natural orbs would be good enough to follow out the map he drew for us, especially with his comments down the edge to keep us to the track. They were too. It was a matter of a couple of weeks or so nailing down the precise spot. Not bad going, because it was a different sort of place in those days, you remember. No push-cars and things to trundle you up the mountains. And we had our kit to carry : grub, and guns, and tools. Perhaps it took us three weeks. Can't be certain now ; but good going all the same. And it doesn't matter. It's down there under the mud that we found the gold. Under the mud. . . . You can relish Patala's little pleasantry, eh ? ' Down there under the mud, you damned white man ! If you want it go and look for it ; but you needn't come back again ! Disappear ! ' . . . My God ! and don't you see—if you linger here ? . . . Haven't I told you ? Get away now ! Get away ! . . . ”

He flapped a hand feebly as his utmost effort to emphasize his words. His face took on a look of intense pain. His eyes moistened. Laura mothered him severely, while Stephen tried to orientate himself to this shifting revelation. His uncle was clearly under the delusion that he had already told them his story. Unless, of course, he had actually told Laura in Stephen's absence. But that seemed unlikely. Under Laura's coaxing he seemed to be willing to tell it again ; but at any moment the narrative might break abruptly off, might dwindle into irrelevancies, might lose itself as now in outcries for them to be gone. But it was essential that they should hear the story to its conclusion. Surely it was for this that they had come. Somewhere there was a virtue in it which was to be their salvation. That much at least of Cartwright's curious fantasy they understood. Yet the whole issue of their enterprise depended now on the whim of a man whose mind seemed to be irresponsibly astray.

Laura guided her father back to his narrative. "We'll go soon," she said. "There's plenty of time. You were telling us about the gold."

"The gold !" he muttered. "Yes, that was a matter of digging. Digging in the dark, you understand. Couldn't risk it in the day. And you had to be mighty careful. A slip, and in you would go. More than once we were nearly under. I tell you, that stuff sucks at you like an infernal mouth. You can feel it sucking. Becomes one enormous leech fastened on to you. God ! Horrible ! And we could only work at night. We

hadn't got old Dutchie's glass eye. No miracles in our outfit. Simply had to keep hidden. Luckily no one much passed this way. Guess they didn't fancy it. Even so we left no traces. With the morning we covered up the hole we had made. Easily done. Make a hurdle of branches and slop on some mud. Soon melts in with the rest. But it made it slow going. Slower than it might have been, that is, because we were almighty lucky. 'Dig plenty deep,' Van Loon warned us. 'The gold's at the bottom.' We dug plenty deep. Virtue wasn't its only reward that time. Every night saw the pile rising. But we couldn't always work. Had to get some food to eke out our store. Good fishing in the river up top, we found. But again, we had to lie pretty low. And all day we slept. Slept in there. I tell you we were tired. And no one seemed to know of that cubby hole. We always pulled the door to, mind you. We weren't taking risks. Door? A handy bush that grew there. It was Van Loon told us of the cave too. That man's glass eye had the second sight, I should say. If we could get a loan of it now we might see our way clear again. Hell of a mess, come to think of it. I must have been mad. But maybe you'll learn to forgive me. I thought I spotted a chance ; one in a million. You never know how a thing'll work out until you've put it to the proof. Not in matters of the spirit, anyway. You can judge an eclipse to a nicety, but not a human action. You've proved that for yourselves, I dare say. Don't think I speak in blame. I was mentioning the fact merely. Eclipse ! But the jolly old moon sails

out of it again, serene as ever. But with us humans, once the shadow's passed over you. . . . You see, I might have known. I was playing for that second chance which never comes to a fellow. Leave it to the miracle-mongers to believe that a man can rise from the dead. What you do, like what you eat, gets built into you. You can't say it's here, or here, and cut it away. What's the soul after all but the sum of a man's actions shaped by suffering? The only comfort is that the wretched thing can die, in spite of what the eternalists tell you. That's a privilege it shares with the body. It stands to reason. Flesh or spirit, nothing can endure to be tortured for ever. And death's simply the point of surrender, body or soul. It's a monstrous cruel system anyway, but not so cruel that it denies you the right to die. Oh, I know all about the will to live. That's a trick too; a deliberate one. As though a nerve should be specifically sensitized to suffer pain. You see, without it we should go under too soon, and the gods would miss their amusement. I speak in a figure, of course. And yet I don't know. It beats me. The whole purpose of tragedy is that happy folk should sit in comfort and applaud. And if there are no gods to applaud, then why all this elaborate staging for our endless epic farce? And let me tell you too: they say God suffers. That be damned for a yarn! If people would only think! Tragedy was never written for the miserable. If God suffered He'd have arranged things a little more comically. It's the folk with the long faces who are always on the look-out for a laugh. Well, perhaps he gets his

laugh too. Farce, did I say? Farce teaches you to laugh spitefully. If you're sufficiently divine I suppose an earthquake would be screamingly funny, like a cheap picture-show! You know the sort—motor-cars running amok among market-stalls to make the kids shriek! And for a more select entertainment, just delicately to curl the lips, watch a soul going to pieces! . . ."

"Dear father," Laura said gently, taking his hand for a moment in both her own. His voice broke, and his eyes filled with tears. He drew his hand free, and impatiently brushed the tears away, his arm falling limply to the ground again. Stephen looking at him felt an amusement touched with a sharp pity. He had been slowly slipping while he had been speaking, and now only his head and shoulders were supported against the rock. Stephen rose and lifted him to a more upright position. It was like lifting a sack.

"How about a pipe?" Stephen asked.

"Put one on this morning," Cartwright said, "but couldn't relish it. No taste. I've been told by fellows who've been gassed that that's a sure sign of the end. I don't know about that. But the taste's gone anyway, like the taste for a number of things. For everything, come to that—except. . . . But what are you waiting for, eh? Is it my talk that keeps you? I'll keep on talking after you've gone. Do instead of a pipe. Become a habit. But it won't help you with Patala. Lobu warned me. Advised me to hold my tongue. Patala seems to have his knife in fellows who talk. Death on them. I asked Lobu, what about Gregory?"

Is that man ever quiet? 'How does your master endure Gregory san?' I asked.—'Gregory san speaks as a bird sings, because he has a full heart,' Lobu said. His actual words. 'And that is good. But some men's lips run over with words as a rock runs over with water. Such water never abides.' Can't you hear him? Well—I forget how that applies now. Something I was saying about Patala. What was it?"

"You were telling us how you escaped from the cave," Laura said.

Cartwright glanced sharply at her. "Escaped from the cave?" he repeated. "A nightmare! A nightmare! All sorts of disturbances. We didn't know what was happening. Everything had been so quiet. Then all of a sudden there were comings and goings. Whole tribes on the war-path, I should say. Battles and rumours of battles. We had to lie pretty low. Then it seemed to pass over. And this was when we were already planning to quit. Getting short of grub too. And with the natives on the prowl we couldn't get out fishing. But it seemed to pass over, as I said. We decided to make a dash for it. Left all our kit behind except the guns—and the gold. Then Spender broke his leg. Nothing at all under any other circumstances. Heavy man, your father, Stephen. Slipped coming up the path here. Rather a nasty fall, and fractured—forget the fellow's name—fibia, tibia, I don't know; the lesser of the two. We got it set all right and put up in splints. But it would mean some weeks' delay. And on three days' rations. Four days' at a stretch. It wouldn't

have mattered if we had had food. And we never knew when things might suddenly waken up again, not having a morning paper to put us *au fait* with the local wars. You see? Now what was the obvious thing to do? You, Stephen, what was the obvious thing to do?"

The question brought Stephen to the alert. It was as though the ghost of the past had re-arisen, not as a shadow but as a living body. It was no idle speculation his uncle was suggesting for his amusement, but a direct and present challenge. Because the problem was his own? He began to work it out aloud, uncertain to what conclusion he might come:

"You couldn't move, yet you couldn't stay without food. The necessity then was to get food."

"Yes, but how? Where?" Cartwright cried with a sudden energy.

"From the river. You had to risk it."

"Night after night? For a month, perhaps? But remember, we had won the gold. Can you understand what that meant? And we weren't going to sacrifice it. Remember too that a year in the place—was it a year?—I don't know—long enough anyway—had left us pretty jumpy. Working at night. Hiding by day. . . . No, you've got to get us out quicker than that. Think again!"

"But you can't get out till my father's leg's well," Stephen argued, as though it was a matter of the present moment.

"Depends what you mean by well," Cartwright

replied. "And don't forget the psychological element. The job was done. Nothing to wait for. That's when the nerve gives way. The problem was to get clear at the earliest possible minute. Yes, minute! I tell you, the thought of an unnecessary day there was intolerable. You must understand that. An unnecessary day? An age of purgatory! Now then, what's your advice?"

Cartwright's face flushed with excitement as he stared at Stephen waiting for his answer. The limpness too had gone from his body. He supported himself on his hands straightening his back against the rock. "Eh, what's your advice?" he repeated.

"To get my father away at the earliest possible minute," Stephen said, "means that he must be supported, or carried. But on such a path——."

"All right, all right!" Cartwright interrupted him. "You've come to the point at last. Supported or carried. Well, I was strong enough in those days. But I couldn't carry him and the gold too. Heavy stuff, gold. And we weren't planning to leave that behind. It was the seal of our success. Not the mere value—but never mind that. And even to support your father—we won't say carry—I couldn't be burdened with the gold. Two men's share, you remember; and a full load at that. But I won't bother you with any more questions. This is what we decided. I was to get away with the gold, hide it, and return for your father."

He paused as though waiting for approval.

"Very well," said Stephen.

Cartwright's energy seemed to have exhausted

itself. He leant back limply against the rock again, panting a little, his arms lying helplessly at his sides.

"The psychological element," he said. "I told you not to forget it. But we forgot it when we separated. Yet what else was there to do—given our state of mind? Three days' rations for two would keep one man for a week. Ample time. And little risk for Spender. He had his gun. If you look at this place you'll see that a man with a gun can keep an army at bay. And in the cave—simply have to sit there and pop at a head as soon as you see it. No danger. And at night—we had a stone. As for the leg—he needed rest anyway. We calculated that in a week—ten days, say—he'd be able to get away if I were free to help him. But in any case the exact time didn't matter. It would be an age less than if we waited till he could dance a jig. It was going to be slow work; we understood that. And it would have to be done by day. But guns against spears we were prepared for an army on such a track. And there was always the chance that we could get out unseen as we got in unseen. We still had those skins."

"What skins?" Stephen asked.

"Didn't I tell you? Why, Van Loon put us up to that," Cartwright explained. "Told us to stain ourselves and dress native. Quite easily done. Meant that no one spotted us from a distance, and we always had time to lie low. We had our measure of luck as well. But after all there was only a day's march in the open, and you've seen

for yourselves how many natives you meet in a day. Yet getting out was going to be more than a day's march. But we had our guns. Not only a miserable revolver. Ye gods, what a fool ! But I was thinking of the *junsä*. If we'd come prepared to sack a city what would the *junsä* have said ? Stick their noses into everything till they've squashed them as flat as your thumb. Still—one revolver ! But I've told you it was a miscalculation. Nothing to do now except to get away, get away as soon as you can. I'll stay and meet Patala. A fitting end if you think of it. Remember—in the cave there. We were famous friends. I believe folk used to talk of us. Well, let me join him. That's not talking wild at any rate. And if I could get out I shouldn't want to. I've made it clear, haven't I, that this is where my story ends ? Haven't I made it clear ? Remember—just there, inside the cave. Kind of you to cover it up. And you know, I didn't expect it. After twenty years—no, I didn't expect it. I tell you, it went to my heart. When you struck that light, Steve. Went to my heart. Might have been waiting there for me—for twenty years. And headless ! I always knew I should return to him. But headless ! Poor old Spender ! They got him then. And I had that crazy notion. . . . But the game's up. I don't know what you'll make of your lives. I'm not sure that you wouldn't do better to write *finis* now. You can never foretell. With the stars and the planets, yes ; even with the comets. But with man, never. Love, friendship—tarnish like gold, but won't polish up again. But I didn't bring you here to

tell you that. I can't quite get it clear now why I did bring you here. A sudden optimism—sure sign of madness. To be sane is to despair. When a man begins to hope, to hope against his knowledge and experience, it's clear that the gods have got him on their wires. 'Dance, you little brute!' And I knew. I know. Suffering makes a man wise—unless it makes him blind. Yet I began to hope again. If we didn't hope there'd be an end of procreation. Our children will do better! Another chance! Another chance for us, not for them. We don't consider them. So we hand the shoddy gift down. Heritage! And what does the new heir do but set up a wail of protestation? Yet we won't take the hint. Wretched little crumpled morsel of a thing! Oh yes, it learns to laugh—when it's big enough to pull a fly to pieces! . . . Hope! The second chance! I was old enough to know, but I let myself be fooled into hope. Not for myself, I said. But it was for myself, through you. It was intolerable that you should be unhappy. Analyse that, now, and tell me how many parts selfishness to one part altruism. So foolish too. As though you weren't taken in the same snare as the rest of us. But I thought that seeing it, facing it. . . . Of course, it was that fellow Waters. He used to talk. . . ."

He ceased speaking, his eyes closed. He was slipping down again on to his back. Laura would have settled him upright once more, but he resisted. "No, let me lie down," he said. "I'm tired. God! but I'm tired! But it can't be long now. And there's no more fitting grave for me than

here. I always knew it would end here. Bury my body where my soul died twenty years ago. And old Spender in there—prop me up alongside. Then seal the door and leave us to it. Old Spender will forgive. . . .”

He became maudlin, wept a little, and seemed to be falling asleep. Stephen was alarmed lest he should be cheated of the end of the story.

“Did you get clear?” he asked.

“Three nights!” Cartwright roused himself again. “Lay up all day. Once back it wouldn’t matter; but getting away, and returning, I mustn’t be seen. Three nights. The psychological element, you remember. We had forgotten that. You don’t divide a man by two when you take him from his friend; you divide him by a thousand, by infinity. But I got clear. I got into cover. And then they found me! . . .”

He sat up suddenly erect and whispered hoarsely, “Faces! . . . Faces! . . .” He stared in front of him, and tried to indicate something, then collapsed, and for a little lay moaning.

It seemed cruel to question him, but Stephen could not refrain. “And while you were away my father was killed?” he asked.

“You see—they got his head,” Cartwright answered tonelessly. “And I didn’t die. Not this husk of me, at least. But take the sword away and the sheath will lose its shape. This is the end, though not the end I was playing for. Something else I had in mind. Mere lunacy, of course. . . .”

Stephen lost the drift of his lamentation. His life-long resentment against his uncle seemed to

ripen to a sudden hostility. Since childhood he had been submitted to the infection of Cartwright's querulous self-pity. And now it had come to this. The hills around ; the mud below ; the sentinels at the gates. Because once this man had been too cowardly to die, and ever since had been too cowardly to live. Stephen remembered that his mother had never forgiven him. And yet that night beneath the moon had revealed to him what he might have been. His youth had returned to him then, his hope, his courage, his idealism. "Life exalted, transfigured. . . ." He could talk like that. But now he lay abject and broken. "Why must you have it all over again ?" he was complaining. Of course, he wasn't responsible. His mind was failing him. But his failing mind was the outcome of his life of futility. If only he would die they might get away from here, he and Laura. And wasn't the man pleading with them to go ?

"Is this your revenge, eh ?" he was saying. Stephen realized that his uncle was staring at him wildly, struggling to rise to his elbow. "Is this your revenge, to sit here and be slaughtered ? But it won't be the spear for you ; it'll be the mud. Can't you see that ? The mud ! Oh, I know I can't frighten you, damn you ! But think of me ! Are you planning for me to see you die ? Is that your vengeance ? Pretty and Oriental ! But if you won't go when I tell you, I know a way."

Laura was suddenly upon him, gripping his wrist. Cartwright gave a savage scream, and fell limp beneath her. She loosened his fingers from

the revolver he had tried to draw from under his tunic, and handed the weapon to Stephen. Cartwright lay breathing heavily, his face ashen, his body prostrated.

Stephen looked moodily at the revolver. "Why did you stop him?" he asked.

CHAPTER XIX

L AURA looked angrily across at Stephen. "If I thought you meant that!" she said.

"At least it would cut the knot," Stephen replied, too honest entirely to recant.

Laura settled her father as comfortably as she could. There was nothing else to do for him. Then she sat herself beside him as though on guard.

"If you suspect me of homicidal intentions," Stephen said, "you'd better take the revolver." He held it out to her. She ignored the action, and he tossed it on the sand beside her.

They were both in a difficult mood, and he knew it. He tried to master his ill-humour, telling her of what he had learnt during his investigations across the pool. When he had finished he said, "If we had to make a get-away it might be better to try that end."

Laura made no comment.

It still wanted an hour or so to noon, but for something to do Stephen revived the fire and prepared lunch. The morning had been grey, even threatening rain, but the sun began to triumph now. There was little shelter on the platform. It looked as though they would need to retreat into the cave. The fire scorched the air already fierce with the sun, and as soon as they could dispense with it they trampled it out. Laura arranged a blanket

above her father to shade him, and lunch over they sat back to either side of him under the protection of it. There seemed nothing to do now but to wait.

Stephen had made what advances he dared. To suggest a definite abandonment of the situation would be to alienate himself completely from Laura. So he was surprised when she asked, "You think it would be possible then to make a get-away?"

"Worth the risk, anyhow," he replied more brightly.

"Well—tell me," she said.

He outlined the plan which he had already contemplated.

"And how about observation?" Laura asked.

"If I knew from where we were being observed," he said, "I could answer that."

"From all round, surely."

"Well, something always has to be left to chance."

"I don't call it chance," she retorted, "deliberately to slip your neck into a noose."

Stephen's ill-humour returned on him. Having put his scheme into words he could see himself how unpractical it was, but it didn't please him to hear Laura's damaging criticism.

"We can be certain of one thing," she was saying. "Wherever they're watching us from they've got their eyes on us here. We can't move either up or down without being seen. And if we try, all three, to get round to the other gate we'll find them pretty wide-awake by the time we reach it. Do you propose slaughtering the whole tribe

to get through? They've also got guns. Besides, I'm not sure that we could manage father between us, even with a clear path."

"Then you intend staying here till Patala finds us?" Stephen asked.

"Well," she answered, "we may be in a trap, but we're also in a fortress."

"Where we can be starved out."

"If help doesn't come."

"And where should help come from?" he demanded testily.

She didn't answer for a little. Then she began again in a changed voice:

"I think we're working at the thing from the wrong end. The real question surely is, not, how can we escape? but, ought we to escape?"

Stephen began to fidget. "If we knew why we were here——," he interrupted her.

"For something desperately earnest," she retorted. "We know that well enough."

"We know too that whatever it is it's gone hopelessly astray," he said, glancing bitterly at Cartwright lying prostrate between them.

"Yes, hopelessly astray," she consented, speaking with a quiet significance. "If we start quarrelling—at such a time as this! . . . Hopelessly astray!"

Stephen tried again to crush down his absurd annoyance. "Come now," he said in a conciliatory tone, "let's admit that the thing's a failure. It remains then to get away."

She wasn't so easily convinced. "You forget," she told him, "how it is that we're here at all. Father can't tell us anything just now, but are we

to ruin everything for him because he's helpless? Before I move from here I intend to know what he really wishes us to do?"

"Well," Stephen opened his hands, "could he have expressed himself more positively?"

"*Really* wishes," Laura emphasized the word. "Was he thinking merely of our lives, or of our—our love?"

Stephen looked passionately across at her, instantaneously responding to the sudden emotion in her voice. "Yes, Laura, I admit it; I admit it," he cried. "For you and me mere life means nothing. Didn't your dad sit up half the night expounding that to me? And he brought us here with some great idea of salvation in mind. Goodness knows what. He wasn't very lucid. But I felt the inspiration, though I couldn't follow the argument. And I know, I know quite well, that if we're only to go back to what we left behind us—think of it! that night! . . . My God, Laura! . . . Well, a clean hole through the head with this little fellow would be infinitely preferable. And I know it quite well. But I want to live if only to prove to you. . . . If it's a lesson we needed haven't we learnt enough?"

"Do you think so?" she said.

He knew what she meant. "But we didn't quarrel, did we?" he put it to her. "Besides, with your nerves on edge—don't you think there are excuses?"

"Oh yes, there are always excuses," she answered; "but not for you and me."

"Of course—we must have it perfect, or nothing.

. . . All right, I surrender. Then it ends here !” But his voice sounded toneless and without conviction.

She spoke his name softly, and looking across at her he was amazed to see her weeping.

“ Why, Laura ! ” he exclaimed, and was at once at her side.

“ That’s better,” she said. “ Now he’s not between us ! ”

Her words went straight to his heart. He was conscious of a sudden illumination. Of course, it was Cartwright who had always been between them, though feverishly straining to hold them together. And never more between them than now when he lay speechless and inert.

Laura recovered her tranquillity, though she kept a nervous grip of Stephen’s hands. “ I was so afraid,” she said. “ I thought you were going to fail me. You don’t know how weak I am.”

“ No, you keep it so well hidden,” Stephen told her cheerily, though feeling that the battle had gone against him and that nothing remained to him but an acquiescent passivity.

“ Well, then, now we can make our plans,” Laura said.

“ Then there are to be plans ? ” he cried, amazed.

Laura looked aside at her father. “ If only he could speak ! ” she said.

“ Never mind ! ” Stephen exclaimed, eager to maintain his advantage. “ We’ve got to rely on ourselves now. Perhaps that’s what he brought us here to learn. No good praying to a deaf heaven. Prayers are never answered unless you answer them

yourself. Come, if there's anything to be done——."

"Yes, you always liked doing things," she told him, "if I would sit by and watch!"

"Successful scheme too!" he declared, unable to restrain his high spirits now that he sensed the possibility of action. "I tell you, Laura, the prospect of sitting here moping till Patala came——."

"Yet you see the difficulty, don't you?" Laura persisted. "Whatever you decide to do, you must first see that. It hasn't been our show at all, and somehow it seems all wrong for us to interfere. We didn't come here to act, but to suffer. Surely."

"But your father told us——" he began.

"Yes, I know, I know," she admitted. "But what did he mean? Stephen, just what has happened to make him throw in like this?"

"Since we don't even know his first intention——."

"That skeleton!" Laura said softly.

"Don't!" Stephen exclaimed.

"Well, it frightened him, didn't it?"

"Laura, let's be reasonable," Stephen argued with her. "We know two things. Let's keep to those. Your father's purpose has failed, and he wishes us to go before it's too late."

"He wishes us to leave him behind, if it comes to that," she said.

"Well, there of course we disobey," he declared. "There are limits after all. . . . Now then, what about our plans? . . . My God, Laura!" he

cried suddenly, "twenty years ago your father and mine were sitting here discussing precisely the same problem!"

"And they decided that one was to go and one was to stay," she said.

"Do you mean to say that you propose that now?" he asked.

"Now listen, Stephen," she spoke with a slow emphasis; "I believe I've got it clear. If you're to do the acting, you must allow me to do the thinking, you know! You must leave me here with father while you go and warn the *junsa*."

"The *junsa*!" he exclaimed.

"There, you see at once how ridiculous it sounds," she said. "Isn't that a clear warning that we should leave the thing alone? Yet without the *junsa* how can we get through?"

The incongruity of appealing to the police still held Stephen silent. What had the police to do in such an affair? An affair so entirely of the spirit? If Cartwright had been positive about one thing it was that the police should be kept aloof. Stephen realized that he was still under the spell of his uncle's mysticism. In spite of Lobu's warnings and his own investigations he had not yet exactly visualized the danger that menaced them. An actual death, there in the mud! But the full significance of it came to him now. It came with a shock of horror that for the moment unnerved him, and then left him braced and steadied. Those enemies there on the hills were no shadowy abstract forces, but men with knives at their belts, and guns. His uncle lying helpless beside him

was no mere symbol of an exhausted soul, but a living creature to be saved from a horrible death. And Laura. . . .

"But to leave you here!" he exclaimed, his fingers tightening about her hands.

"It's the only way," she told him.

The psychological element! To separate! . . . But he must purge his brain of his uncle's phrases if he was to determine clearly.

He picked up the revolver and examined the chambers. "Only three cartridges!" he said.

"Did he mean them for us after all? One each?"

"I have my knife," Laura reminded him.

"And in the cave there. . . . I don't think anyone'll enter if I choose to keep him out! . . . Besides, even three cartridges—I've got the path commanded both ways. I can make certain of three, and they're not to know that I haven't a pouchful. . . . If it's to be done at all, Stephen, that's the only way."

"I believe you're right," he said; "but I don't like it."

He sat thinking the thing over. Yet how else could they win clear? Impossible really to carry Cartwright with them. But to leave Laura alone. . . .

Laura began to discuss the affair in its more immediate bearings. Her suggestion was that to elude the sentinels she should create a diversion to draw them from their post while Stephen slipped through unseen. "A white woman should be a bit of a curiosity," she said. "Savages are usually all eyes for anything new. Unless you have a better plan? But we want to avoid killing."

"Yes, we want to avoid killing," he agreed, half conscious of a paradox somewhere.

"Then, the sooner the better," she said.

Before starting Stephen refilled the water-bottles from a spring which seeped from the cliff, and arranged the kit as conveniently as he could inside the cave. He would have cut some more firewood if Laura had not prevented him. "Can't you see you're doing me out of my only pastime?" she said. There was nothing more to do, but he still lingered, walking in and out of the cave, fingering things, unable to reconcile himself to leaving Laura behind.

She urged him to go.

"Well, perhaps I'll soon be back," he said. "If I fall in with some friendly Tsuwo this afternoon I can send him for the *junsä*. He'll travel much quicker than me. Perhaps he'll reach them to-night. Then to-morrow——."

"Look here," she interrupted him, speaking seriously, "this job mustn't be bungled. You trust no one but yourself. Now then, come!"

"Yes, but I'm thinking of you!" he cried.

"Something always has to be left to chance," she reminded him, smiling.

He drew her into the cave and embraced her passionately. "Once, if never again!" he said.

They came out on to the platform, ready now to start. Cartwright still lay on his blanket, speechless and unseeing. Stephen felt a last twinge of doubt. Had Laura been right after all when she said they should not interfere? Not to act, but to suffer, she had told him. He seemed to see that for himself

now, looking down at his uncle. What had action to do in such a case? Yet everything had gone so hopelessly astray! And this was the end of their pilgrimage—to call in the police!

“Laura, it’s absurd!” he cried.

He wanted to go back on all he had said, to repeat her own arguments to her, to insist on waiting for whatever might be preparing for them.

She drew him gently away.

“Very well!” he yielded. “But the whole thing’s as stupid as a dream!”

They began to climb down the cliff.

PART V

CHAPTER XX

IF the escape were to succeed at all the more direct the attempt the better. Although they could see no one, Stephen and Laura felt strangely conscious of eyes upon them until they gained the shelter of the shrub which skirted the pool ; but they made no effort to disguise their objective. Their hope was that as Cartwright remained behind the savages would not suspect them of planning a get-away. They picked their steps among the bushes, while Laura explained her ruse more carefully. " It really doesn't matter if they see us here," she said. " In fact, it's better that they should see us. They must know we're up to something, so it's no good pretending we're out for an afternoon stroll. The problem is to pit their curiosity against their suspicion. So we'll treat them to a Sun-dance of the Western Barbarians ! " They elaborated the scheme together as they worked their way round the pool. When they reached the wooded nose of the bluff which Stephen had already climbed during the morning they halted, and leaving the protection of the bushes came boldly out into the open.

Without hurry they examined the ground for a clear firm stretch on which to execute their dance. That was no easy matter on such soil, but they found a reasonably dry space where a bank of more

resistant sand pushed above the mud. They marked it out in a single wide circle, then taking up their position in the centre they lifted their hands to the sun and solemnly prostrated themselves. Next they moved three times round the circle in a slow Morris step, again prostrating themselves in the centre, and then facing each other across the ring they drew their handkerchiefs and danced a Morris jig, following it with a third prostration. After this they retired to the shelter of the bushes, but without entirely concealing themselves and rested. Though careful not to betray their consciousness of being observed they were already able to locate a spectator or two on the hills.

Next they danced in turn—hornpipes, cakewalks, reels, flings—Stephen first, followed by Laura, and then Stephen again. They made no haste—indeed it was fatiguing work beneath such a sun—leaving ample pauses between the dances, the one not performing always remaining in shelter. In this way they let at least an hour go by, executing perhaps half a dozen dances each. Stephen grew impatient, but Laura refused to hurry the issue. And they were well rewarded. Curious heads, making no attempt at concealment now, dotted the rim of the hills.

As yet they had not drawn the two sentinels who were guarding the passage, at least not so far as they knew. They were dancing out of sight of them, and unless the men could receive intelligence from the watchers on the heights they could know nothing of the proceedings. But it was now time to risk the final move. Once again they danced

together, then after a pause Laura advanced to the ring alone. She prostrated herself with a profound and extended obeisance, then rising lifted her hands to the sun and commenced to sing. The place was a natural theatre, swelling her voice to an echoing resonance. The heads about the summits became complete bodies standing boldly up to see and listen. Further prostrations, then a deliberate encircling of the ring to a slow minuet measure, prostrations in the centre, and a second song. Her repertoire had little bearing on the situation, except to a strained fancy, but it showed in what tradition she had been nurtured : *Kathleen Mavourneen*, *Oh dear, what can the matter be ?*, *The Minstrel Boy*, *Men of Harlech*, *A Chequered Career*. But the songs accomplished their purpose. The figures on the hills might have been carved in wood, standing rigid and motionless.

Meanwhile Stephen had withdrawn into the bushes, cutting over the bluff as he had done in the morning till he had the sentinels in view. At the first notes of *Kathleen Mavourneen* they sat up stiffly to attention, eyeing each other but without speaking. The song over, they were mute for a few minutes, then fell into an animated discussion, though still obviously alert for the singing to begin again. *Oh dear, what can the matter be ?* shook their resolution, and they crept a little way round the bluff, reluctantly returning when the song ended. But at *The Minstrel Boy* they succumbed, setting off in a rapid scamper as though at a pre-concerted signal. The gate stood open.

Stephen lost no time. He was immediately

through the last of the trees, over the barrier edge of rock, and dropping swiftly down towards the gorge. Reaching cover he still made all speed. He gained the river which came swirling down from the right between steep walls. On the hither side, leading in either direction along the top of the bank, lay a narrow path among the trees and bushes, trodden clear, it must be, by the constant passage of men moving in single file. Obviously the path of which Lobu had spoken. It promised easy going and excellent concealment, if only it did not lead him astray. But at least he was free, and the sun would guide him. He turned into the path, making up stream. He trod buoyantly, his heart light at his unexpected good fortune. The words of *Oh dear, what can the matter be?* hummed themselves in his head. He wanted to laugh, remembering how the savages had been outwitted. What a jolly farce it had been! They must be watching Laura yet, astonished at the fervour of her devotion. But it was no laughing matter for Laura, singing there in the sun. . . .

All at once he drew up short. He had been dreaming, and was not quite certain what had arrested him. A sound. He listened, moving cautiously forward again. Another step might have betrayed him. He made a single leap sideways into the shrub, and remained crouched to the earth. Three Tamawalu women passed by with fish-baskets at their backs. For a few minutes he waited in case there were more to come. Only women, but they might have been men; and even women could frustrate his purpose. The slender

margin of his escape, the pure chance of it, left him shaken in confidence. "What a let-off!" he muttered, feeling a warning in its very triviality. The next time he might be taken. But there must be no next time. The path must be abandoned.

There remained only one other route: the river itself. If he lost touch with the river he would soon go astray. And once in the river channel, provided the going were possible, he should be reasonably secluded because for the most part the track was screened from it. He hesitated, wondering whether to force his way to it through the shrub; but he decided to return a little to a gully he had recently passed which would take him down by a surer path. He was soon there. A glance showed him that progress might be slow and difficult, but practicable.

Hugging the cover of the bank he began to make his way up stream again. Such shore as there was alternated between shingle and loose, coarse sand. He took off his boots and slung them from his belt, finding it easier to travel bare-foot. It was a temptation to make a little from the bank to where the boulders strewn more thickly stood out of the water like a broken causeway. By judiciously choosing his track and leaping the gaps he found he could make better headway here than on the sand and shingle; but there was always the danger of being seen. Frequently he had to wade with the water to his knees, to his waist; more than once to swim across an embaying pool which bit into the bank; sometimes clinging to roots and creepers to swing his way over a rapid

gully which cut down from the hills. But he was cheered that the channel still curved from the right ; and though he kept his ears alert for it above the plunging of the river he could distinguish no premonitory roaring to announce the fall which he had feared to find barricading his path. Everything seemed in his favour now. His constant dippings kept him cool under the direct blaze of the sun ; the roughness of the way held his attention to his footing, saving him from uneasy speculations. He became increasingly confident that he had struck the valley of the Rubicon.

He was assured of it when, across the stream, he came upon a little Tsuwo settlement, a few huts merely pushed up into a valley which opened into the river and which had been roughly terraced into rice-paddies. On the farther bank he would be in friendly country, he might even find a messenger to send for the *junsa* ; but it was impossible to cross. In mid-channel the current ran powerfully, free of bridging boulders. It was useless hailing the folk to send a boat for him, because a boat would stand less chance than a swimmer. He was obliged to pass by. Perhaps an hour later he reached another settlement, and occasionally an isolated fisherman's hut. And then suddenly the bank on his own side of the stream opened into a pool where some Tamawalu boys were fishing. On the shore beyond, a hut or two showed among the trees.

He drew back quickly behind the angle of the bank, and halted to consider. To swim across would mean almost certain exposure. The only

alternative was to make a detour up the hill-side behind the bay. He understood by now the simple configuration of the valley. Bluff alternated with gully forming a winding shore where slender tributary runnels cut down between steep banks of tottering cliff. He returned on his tracks to the last gully, and guiding himself by it pushed up on to the slope of the hill. At first he advanced slowly, careful to avoid noise, because somewhere here the river-side path must run and there might be people passing. But once he had crossed the path he made forward more rapidly. It was a matter of twisting, burrowing, creeping, climbing, up a steep and slippery water-way, rocky and pebble-strewn, which tunnelled among roots under a damp and brushing fringe of foliage. Progress was sure if he kept a sharp eye to his footing, but laborious ; and there was always the risk of miscalculating his distance. Rather than do so he allowed a generous margin before turning to encircle the settlement. But there was a danger in this too. The higher he climbed the thinner grew the shrub. It left him a clearer path, but robbed him of cover. But that was a hazard he must accept. Moving parallel to the river now he made round the intervening bluff which separated him from the valley which opened below into the pool where the boys were fishing. Reaching the bluff beyond he knew he had safely circumvented the main danger, and once in the farther gully he commenced to redescend towards the river. This was merely a reversal of the ascent. There was the same necessity for caution as he neared the path, but he crossed it without hindrance and

regained the shelter of the stream. He was able to make headway once again ; but the delay annoyed him, somewhat dashing his spirits. It was likely to repeat itself wherever a wider valley opened down the hill.

It did repeat itself.

His object now was to cross the river. He made the attempt where the boulders lying out from the shore narrowed the channel. But here the current ran still more fiercely. He thought he might battle across at the sacrifice of a few hundred yards. He plunged and struck out vigorously, but was immediately swept down the stream. He was wise enough to admit defeat, and steered inshore without contesting further. But the difficulty now was to strike a safe landing-place. The river raced him past the boulders as he attempted to grip, whirling him out by the legs and rolling him helplessly under ; and to aim full would have been to invite a fractured skull. But he kept his nerve steady, and holding his head high watched his chance. It came at last. Well towards the shore a large flat surface of granite sloped up out of the water. He put out all his strength steering towards it, and at the last moment with arms outstretched like a diver's he surrendered himself to the stream, and was swept up into safety like a beaching boat. He lay quiet a little, recovering his breath ; then picking his way along the tops of the boulders towards the shore he set himself to reconquer the ground he had lost. It had been a good battle, but a silly waste of time.

Later he was more fortunate. There proved

after all to be a drop in the river-bed, but not the formidable one he had dreaded. It was a matter of a few feet only, and far from being an obstacle it was an ally. The edge of the fall was craggy and broken, dividing the water which came curving over like the fingers of a hand. Stephen saw at once that it might be possible to make from rock to rock and so bridge the stream. He promptly essayed it. There were no large gaps, but even so it was dizzy work. He took his time, making sure of every step. A fall here would be as fatal as into a hundred-foot cataract. In the middle it was necessary to jump. He had a moment of hesitation, but he knew he could manage it. He landed safely on the rock beyond, and was soon on the farther shore. He had no need to consider his tactics now. He turned up hill by the first gully hoping to find a path as on the other side of the river. When he came upon it, it seemed to him not so much a gift of fortune as the result of an assured calculation. He put on his boots, drenched as they were, and set off confidently, not attempting to muffle his passage, humming one of Laura's songs.

It was his intention, in spite of Laura's warning, to despatch some friendly Tsuwo for the police, then gaining the bridge where they had crossed the river the previous evening to make his way back to the hollow. There would be no difficulty in passing the sentinels from this end; they would admit him all right into the trap. But here he was unsuccessful. Three times, coming upon a group of natives, he tried to explain his case. They stood

without a word, eyeing him gravely, but unable to understand. "*Nihongo ga dekimas' ka?*" he besieged them with his Japanese. But they seemed too isolated, too remote, for schooling to have reached them. The children only showed vague signs of comprehension. It was altogether too risky to trust to such interpreters. He moved on, discouraged. At the third attempt the lean fisherman whom he addressed, judging him presumably by his fretful manner and his soiled clothes, bowed him courteously into his hut, set a stool for him, and offered him a mess of fish which his wife was broiling at the smoke-hole. Stephen felt suddenly hungry, and accepted with gratitude. He ate ravenously, holding the fish in his hands and biting into it as into a slice of bread. His hosts watched him solemnly, occasionally exchanging a word. He was surprised at his own appetite, but once satisfied he felt invigorated and cheered. He didn't dare offer money for the hospitality he had received. He turned out his pockets to see what he possessed. His tobacco was sodden. His pipe was too precious. He came upon a little folding mirror. He presented it to the woman, but the man promptly appropriated it for himself, his gravity giving way to a delighted smile. Stephen had nothing more to offer, so he bowed his way out of the smoky blackness of the hut, and set off once more on his journey.

The sun had already dipped behind the hills as he reached the bridge. The light would not last much longer. He looked back to where he had left Laura behind him. Even now should he

return? He was desperately uncertain. In the twilight he fell an easy prey to his uncle's mysticism. The police meant safety; but their goal wasn't safety, but salvation. He sat down wrestling with his doubts. Not action, but suffering; in other words, not an adventure but an experience. An experience! A flower, that is, that unfolds by its own inner necessity, ruined by the tampering of impatient fingers! He began to think forward along the track he must follow if he pursued his purpose. The night would overtake him long before he could reach their last camping-ground. And in the dark, in spite of his uncle, was it really possible? A nightmare, his uncle had said. He remembered that other adventure when he had been lost in the bush, and flushed with shame. Well, that had been a nightmare too. It was the challenge to redeem himself which determined him to go forward. "Hardly logical!" he muttered, rising. "And I haven't any gold to carry, but I've something infinitely more precious." He turned away up the path.

CHAPTER XXI

WITH the real falling of the darkness he found it impossible to proceed. He sat down again, waiting for the moon. Inaction laid him naked to invading terrors. Sudden shadows loomed before him shaped like men, and dissolved upon the blackness. Innumerable shufflings fretted him to a feverish attention, acute and alert. His strained fancy distorted each least sound so exactly to the padding of feet that he could not remain still, but was driven to essay another step or two along the invisible track. He slipped, dislodging a pebble into the blackness beneath, and paused listening to its distant reboundings against the cliff, till his imagination dizzied picturing the chasm which he could not see. A nearer disturbance sent him scrambling up from the path into a shelter of leaves and branches. He remained hanging there, momentarily expecting some one to pass by. But no one came. Feeling down again for the track he was unable to find a lodging for his feet. There was nothing to do now but to assure his grip and wait for the moon to light him.

Realizing his powerlessness his mind steadied. He began to reason the situation. It was most unlikely that anyone would come. He remembered that Lobu's party had waited till the morning

before setting out along that track. And even if they had discovered his escape and were following him they would be obliged to halt like himself until the moon rose. But was it probable that they had discovered his escape? That set him thinking of Laura. When her dance ended the sentinels would realize that she was no longer accompanied. He had given no thought to that detail of their strategy. So it was quite possible that they were on his trail. Yet he trusted Laura. She would find some way of deceiving them, even if she were obliged to dance till the light failed, returning when it was too dark for them to see her climb back to the cave alone. It would be like Laura to interpret her duty so. He reckoned up the hours—four, five, six—that she must dance and sing, without interval, without rest, under the full beating of the sun. Yet would it be possible for her to endure? “Will versus body!” She was her father’s daughter. “If it were will versus nerve now. . . .” The words came back to him. That was his case. He forgot Laura.

A curious idea began to take possession of him. This was his uncle’s adventure over again. Was that by mere chance, or was there at the back of it some controlling necessity? And that other night in the bush too—a pale reflection of what his uncle must have suffered; yet it was a reflection. Without it he would never have begun to understand. Other dangers he had known in other parts of the world, but never the disintegrating terror of loneliness. Narcissus admires his beauty in the pool, but the final self-revelation for a man is to see

his face mirrored in the black glass of night. Stephen saw himself so mirrored now. He felt sobered and subdued. His uncle too—but if it were for him to forgive he could forgive his uncle.

The ridge across the valley began to detach itself against the brightening sky. Stephen found he could proceed again. The trodden path showed faintly luminous against the darker rock. It was necessary to step with the utmost caution, but when at length the moon leapt clear he could see almost as distinctly as by day. He made good headway. But later it became more difficult again, because the moon moving round behind him set the bluffs half in light and half in shadow. But he had become accustomed to the exigencies of the journey, and even in the shadow stepped with assurance. At the first landslide, certainly, he felt a return of the old hesitation, but once launched he was again master of himself. Planting each foot firmly in the loose sand he moved confidently forward. The bridges, surprisingly enough, caused him no anxiety. He felt safer swaying over space than treading the treacherous security of the mountain-side. It was only a matter of time now.

Yet there were alarms. . . .

The noises of the night no longer perturbed him. Having proved them so often deceptive he neglected them, fortifying himself in a false assurance. But once, turning at some more significant sound, he saw on the point of the spur behind him the figure of a man outlined against the luminous mist of the valley. For a moment only. The shadow swallowed him as he began to circle inward around the bay.

Stephen himself was well screened, having reached the thick shrub about the gully. There was no bridge here, and the path hugging the cliff curved deeply among ferns. But beyond, the farther wall of the bay lay bare to the moon. To advance would be to expose himself without the possibility of concealment. To wait on the path would make the meeting unavoidable. Though he could not see him he knew the man was advancing towards him. For a moment he contemplated murder. He had the advantage, and a bold push would send the man into the gulf below. But he didn't even know that he had to do with an enemy. He had seen a silhouette only, indistinguishable by dress or colour. Besides, he knew he hadn't the heart for that kind of killing. He groped about him, thinking to drag himself among the ferns. His hand closed round a dangling creeper. He drew at it ; it held firm. He swarmed up it, and reaching a tree branch clung. Like a shadow the man passed beneath him ; two men ; he had only seen one. Just as well that he had not attacked them. He lost them till they came out into the moonlight. Nothing to be frightened at after all ; they were Tsuwo. But it was a shock to his confidence.

After this for a while he found himself starting at every sound. Each time before venturing into the moonlit spaces he looked cautiously back, then hurried for shelter. It was a temptation to linger in the shadows and assure himself of friendly bushes and convenient creepers. He had to resist the impulse to scramble into hiding whenever a leaf rustled or a bird fluttered. But he did resist,

thinking his way back into his earlier calm. Still under the influence of the obsession that he was being proved as his uncle had been proved before him he felt that to succeed he must not merely reach his goal but reach it with mastery of spirit. He came to the top of the ridge.

That at least was a stage of the journey. He was in his home valley now, so he thought of it, though there were several hours of travel yet before him. The moon passing over still lit the way for him like a lamp, though the northern walls of the bluffs had not entirely come out into light. And here he received a second shock. As he turned a spur he saw three men on the farther side of the re-entrant making round towards him. A couple of steps brought him into shadow, but they were full in the moonlight. And they were Tamawalu. They showed no sign of having seen him ; but how to escape ? There was no shelter here unless he could gain the gully ; and even there he could not be certain. But that was the only chance. He hurried forward. This time there was a bridge, but little concealment. He groped for a bush, for a creeper, but could find nothing. It was a longer bridge than some, and, the farther end lying in light, he could see them beginning to cross. Holding to the foot-rope he swung himself under the bridge, drawing his body close against the wall of the cliff. He could feel the rope vibrate as they advanced. One by one they stepped over him as he clung there. He waited till they had had time to round the spur, then drew himself on to the path again. But for a long time he sat there

trembling, not daring to proceed. He had escaped by a mere chance. Next time he might come upon them in full light. And clearly they were out for him. How else to account for their midnight prowlings? This wasn't their country. They had discovered his escape and were on his trail. . . . Yet there was hope. They had turned back unable to find him. It wasn't likely that they would follow him again. Nor was it likely that there was another party seeking him. Surely now he was safe. . . . But of what avail was argument when his nerve was broken?

After this it was, as his uncle had said, a nightmare. Not a hundred yards without some alarm to send him shrinking into hiding. He was conscious of something within him contemplating his antics with a bitter mockery; and when he tried to tell himself that he was playing for safety, that Laura's life depended on his success, the mockery became almost audible as though an actual voice had laughed. Even his footing became unsteady. He completely lost confidence now, gripping at the cliff with both hands. He began to negotiate a landslide in this manner, though he could hear his uncle's voice in warning, "Lean out!" Half-way across he slipped. He clutched wildly, burying his fingers in the sand, while a loose rain of dust and stones swept over him. He drove his feet into the rubble, and gradually edged away from the unsettled space to where the path became firm again. He crossed in safety, but he hadn't the heart for more. It was a defeat, he told himself, but he could save it from becoming a disaster. It would

soon be morning now. He established himself in a sheltered corner and waited for the day to break.

But the waiting threw him into a nervous agitation. How had the night passed for Laura between her uncle and that headless skeleton? And what would happen when Patala arrived? His mind became a prey to an unappeasable apprehension. When he reached the camping-ground he was at the end of his endurance. He hurriedly explained the situation to the boy, and despatched him for the police. But for himself he felt broken and exhausted. A strange hollowness seemed to have taken him as though during the night his spirit had slowly wasted away. He couldn't control his trembling, and although faint with hunger he couldn't eat. A bed was offered him in one of the huts. He collapsed on to it, glad of the darkness because he felt an absurd disposition to tears. A rough curtain drawn across the opening of the partition shut him completely from the little light of the doorway. Now that he was alone he yielded to his weakness, burying his face against the musty bedding. Ridiculous, he knew. But he was tired, had lost control of himself. And in a little he must return. But first he must sleep.

He called to his hosts, "Wake me at noon, please."

Some one put a head around the curtain and said, "Yes, at noon"; and withdrew.

He settled himself, surrendering to his fatigue. Strange fancies gathered over him like clouds, sedative and composing, but shot through with sudden alarms which brought him with a shock

to awareness. He would sink back into a whirl of dreams from which he would be thrown half-stunned like a body from the sea, his mind confused with a receding memory of noise and speed. Innumerable times he was falling into space, ejected into an instant quietude from a troubled and interminable chattering. Once it was Lobu's smile which arrested him into consciousness. Once it was Laura's singing. But trying to recall her song, only an insane echo lingered in the air :

It may be for years, and it may be forever ;
Johnny's so long at the fair. . . .

After this he was more widely awake for a little, his mind busy with the obsession of the night : that by a conspiracy of circumstances he was repeating his uncle's adventure of twenty years ago. A conspiracy of circumstances ! His uncle's own phrase ! Yet that was how it came to him. And he realized that through all the bewildering tumult of his dreams that idea had in some form been predominant. It was as though he had been pursuing it through the convolutions of a labyrinth loud with the halloos of the chase. His uncle's adventure ! He began to fumble in his pocket, but remembered that he had given his mirror away. He wanted it to examine his hair, imagining that it must have turned white. That advised him how nearly asleep he was. He started into fuller possession of himself, puzzling the problem more seriously. It presented itself to him now in a more concise actuality : soon he must return, as his uncle had returned. Returned to find his friend

dead ! A headless corpse ! . . . He sat up in the darkness. And suppose he too found Laura dead ! Would he sneak away as his uncle had done, or would he have the courage to put an end to himself—over the cliff ? into the mud ? . . . He was under no illusion ; it would require courage. With nothing left to live for, it would still require courage. He didn't judge his uncle. The wonder was that he had returned to his friend at all. Three nights he had been on the way. And after one night Stephen was beginning to tamper with the temptation that he should wait till the police arrived before he set back for the hollow. How the suggestion came to him he didn't know. But he found himself considering it. The police would probably arrive before night. Was there anything to be gained by leaving before they came ? They would carry lanterns and would travel quickly. He could only anticipate them by a few hours even if he started at noon. And by anticipating them he might precipitate a disaster. He called to his hostess, intending to tell her not to disturb him till the boy returned.

But when the woman showed the silhouette of her head round the screen Stephen merely asked her the time. She didn't understand his Japanese, but a child's voice from within answered him, "Very early yet."

"I seem to have slept a long while," Stephen called.

"Only ten minutes," was the answer.

Only ten minutes ! His nightmares always lasted ten minutes !

"Thank you," he said ; and the head disappeared.

He seemed to hear his uncle saying, "Suppose it meant leaving Laura to it. . . ." It was just outside there that he had asked the preposterous question. Three nights ago ! So short a time, yet since then so much had happened to shake the boy's easy assurance. And he was actually contemplating leaving Laura to it, waiting himself for the protection of the police. And suppose there had been no police to summon ! Suppose like his uncle he must return with no one to rely on but himself ! "By God !" he muttered, struggling to envisage himself under such a proof, "I don't know. I don't know. . . ."

But at least he was certain now of his own intentions. He would rest till noon ; then wisely or foolishly, whether the police had arrived or not, he would return to Laura.

That was settled. Come, he wasn't beaten yet ! He fell asleep.

CHAPTER XXII

IT was late in the afternoon when they awakened him. He was wildly angry when he discovered how long they had let him sleep. But he was so tired, they excused themselves, and he slept so soundly, adding as a final reason that the children had been at school who alone could make him understand. He swallowed a hurried meal of herb-soup, maize, and fish, and set out on the return journey.

He was quite certain of himself now ; certain also of his tactics. It would be impossible to re-pass the sentries unseen, so he would surrender himself to the first party he met, even if it were by night, and allow himself to be conducted back to captivity. He felt that further evasions would only trouble his nerve, already fretted and fatigued, with an unprofitable harassment. And forecasting the probable issue of the adventure he knew that he must preserve his spirit serene. Whatever the final proof might be it must find him with purpose intact and unshaken resolution. Accordingly he proceeded at an even and easy pace without a thought to concealment. If anything disturbed him it was that the mist was thickening early over the valley, and the sky was rapidly obscuring with heavy grey cloud which swept low over the tops of the hills. Yet that was not his concern. It was no longer

for him to dispute with circumstance. For good or ill he had accomplished the one task in his power. Looking back upon it he was sceptical of its efficacy, of its wisdom. But in any case it was useless looking back ; and looking forward he became settled in the conviction that there was nothing left him but an unflinching and unquestioning resignation.

Yet when he suddenly found himself confronted with imminent capture his passivity yielded before the imperative urge to act. It had already fallen dusk, and he was still on the hither side of the first long ridge, when rounding a spur he saw a party of three Tamawalu drawn up against the spur beyond. He instinctively drew back under cover, realizing that his task had not yet been accomplished. His purpose to surrender himself remained unshaken ; but the position of those men in ambush told him that the method of surrender had still to be devised. He had no doubt that they were waiting for him—they must be the very three who had passed over him during the night—but their station on the far side of the bay betrayed to him that they were expecting him from the other direction. It must have been chiefly this, and not merely the mist, nor the fact that their position did not command the path by which he had come, which had allowed him to see them without being seen. Their attention was alert for sounds from the other side. But why ?

He set himself to analyse the workings of those savage minds. A night and a day had passed, yet they believed him to be still on the outward journey. Presumably they were certain that he had not

passed them during the night, and that during the day he had concealed himself in the shrub waiting for the return of darkness. So then to deliver himself from this end would inform them gratuitously of his success. They would hurry him to Patala with the discovery. He might lie as he would, but Patala could not fail to guess the object of his journey. And knowing that the police would soon be upon him what would Patala do? With his time limited would he be precipitated into action, or would he be frightened into abandoning whatever his purpose might be? There was no answering that question. But Stephen would not have been human if he had not felt that to deceive his enemies was a virtue in itself. With a certain relish he determined on one last interference before finally abdicating from his right to act.

More climbing. Back to the last gully, and down it to the river-bed. Clambering in the deepening dusk among tangled roots and branches, over sand and mud and boulders, wading, clinging, working round the noses of the bluffs—three for safety—then up again by another gully, burrowing under sodden vegetation up a streaming waterway, jagged with rock, loose with shingle, to emerge on to the path at last with the night already settling. He had done it all before; but the exertion stimulated him. And the knowledge too that once more he had outwitted the savages flattered his self-confidence. They were behind him now. The temptation was to push on and leave them there. If only for the fun of the thing! But that would ruin his plan, so far as he had any plan. He turned

back, and nonchalantly walked into the ambush which he knew was awaiting him.

The three men leapt towards him with a cry. He had no time to consider how he ought to act to sustain his rôle of surprise. They were immediately upon him, had his arms powerfully gripped, covered him with their bodies pressing him back against the cliff. He made no resistance. They broke into an instant and excited chatter, with faces thrust close against his own, curiously and fiercely peering ; he submitted, concerned only to avoid the reek of their bodies and their breath. After a little they drew somewhat away from him, though without relaxing the iron seizure of their fingers. One of them addressed him in a tongue he could not understand. He shook his head. They were amused and began to laugh like children, showing magnificent white teeth. They discussed together, and then another began in broken Japanese, "You—quietly—do you come?"

"Yes, quietly," he replied.

The realization that they had made contact set them laughing more delightedly still. He smiled in return, feeling a certain friendliness for these amiable ruffians whom he had so easily duped.

Still gripping his arms they launched into an animated discussion. At length one of them went back along the path, soon returning with some strands of creeper. They began to bind him. At that he struggled. "It is unnecessary," he said.

"Necessary," their spokesman answered shortly.

"I come quietly," he repeated. "I am a white man. I keep my promise."

“Promise of white man—no good,” the fellow replied.

Stephen’s incipient friendliness was swept away on a surge of indignation against these savages who could credit such a preposterous heresy. It was that old scoundrel Patala who had taught them, knowing nothing of white men, hating them with a blind fury. But resistance was useless. He found himself helplessly trussed up, heaved over a pair of stalwart shoulders, and borne like a bundle along the narrow track. He had decided on a policy of passivity, but not such a passivity as this !

They reached the top of the ridge, but could advance no further. The night fell black beneath a starless sky. It began to rain. There would be no moon. Stephen lay where they had dropped him, submitting to a sudden deluge. The savages became busy in the darkness. They seemed to be rigging up some kind of shelter of branches and leaves. Later Stephen was dragged beneath it. He could hear the rain beating upon it, and heavy drops fell on him from time to time, but it averted the worst of the downpour. If it had not been for the indignity of the bonds, the insult to his honour, he could have endured it all without complaint. But at the thought that these head-hunting barbarians declined to take his word—the word of a white man, the word of an Englishman !—his spirit rebelled. Loyalty ! The star he had followed ! The sword he had kept bright and sharp ! But the light had failed him. The edge refused to bite. . . . And these creatures—they had the brand of the brute still on them ; they smelt like animals !

He fell into a bitter brooding. In some way there was a punishment here. He had himself betrayed his faith that night in Tokyo. The vengeance of a faith betrayed ! That might be terrible as divine justice. There was a necessity in events. It was not chance which had set him here, helpless, a captive, under a blind heaven. It would not be chance which would lead him to whatever awaited him on the morrow. . . . Lead him ? Slung like dead game from the shoulders of a savage ! A fierce craving awoke in him like a physical need to revenge the outrage on Patala.

And Laura ? What of Laura ? . . .

He was shaken awake to find the sky growing light. The journey recommenced ; but his attention was held now to his mere bodily suffering. He was weak with hunger, numbed from his bonds. It was difficult to recognize the workings of an august necessity in such mean and ludicrous discomfort. But a fellow could still endure.

By noon he was back above the pool. Here a rough shelter had been erected, with lesser bivouacs about it disposed over the flatter spur of land which fell down to the bridge of rock that linked the two walls of the hollow. Groups of savages squatted here and there among the rocks and shrub. They rose excitedly at a hail from Stephen's captors, and came swarming around them, chattering, questioning, peering into the boy's face. Suddenly they dispersed. Stephen, deposited on the ground like baggage, found himself gazing up into Lobu's wide smile.

" *O hayō gozaimas' !* " Lobu greeted him politely.

Stephen couldn't trust himself to answer.

His bonds were cut, and he lay free, with the blood struggling painfully back into his numbed limbs.

"Now you must come to Patala," Lobu said.

Stephen made an effort to rise, but not a muscle responded. It was as though he was struggling in his sleep.

"You have made a baby of me," he said. "You must carry me."

At a word from Lobu several hands helped him to his feet. He steadied himself against Lobu, trying to brace his knees. He advanced a step or two towards the shelter like a man just risen from a sick-bed. But he was in no state to parley with Patala yet. He stopped, and said, "If your master wishes to speak with me, first I must wash and arrange my dress. In so dirty a condition I am not worthy to be admitted to your master. Also my honourable inside is empty, and I must eat."

Lobu laughed, and leading him to his own bivouac, next to Patala's, called for food.

CHAPTER XXIII

WHILE Stephen fed, Lobu sat talking with the three captors. Stephen couldn't understand what they said, but he could guess at the subject of their conversation. He watched Lobu's face, wondering whether his bluff would deceive him too ; but that wide smile betrayed nothing. Eventually Lobu dismissed the men, and turned his attention to Stephen. " The *seiyōjin* who come to visit us, they say we have a wonderful country," he said.

" Yes, wonderful," Stephen replied.

" It pleases you ? "

" The country pleases me."

" But the roads, very bad, *né* ? "

" One envies the birds, having wings."

Lobu laughed : " Yet the white men can make themselves wings, so they say. Is it really so ? "

" Yes, it is really so."

" But your wings, you did not bring them ? "

" No, I did not bring them."

" An honourable pity, *né* ? "

" Yes, a pity."

Stephen continued to eat, puzzling over the drift of Lobu's questioning, while Lobu watched him, his smile more radiant than ever.

" Patala will wish to know many things," he began again.

"You may tell him I did not fly," Stephen rejoined.

Lobu burst out laughing with the delight of a child. "My master does not like white men," he said, "but as for me, they please me greatly."

"Like little animals you find us amusing?" Stephen suggested.

"Like little animals," Lobu agreed frankly. "But we must make cages for you, because you scratch and bite."

"Yes, but we have long claws and long teeth," Stephen said, watching Lobu from the corner of his eye as he continued to eat. "You must make big cages for us, Lobu; very big cages. And you must not come near the bars."

"Because you are very fierce, I think."

"The *junsas* have not tamed us."

Lobu winced. His smile lost its mirth, and for a little he sat moodily watching Stephen, who for his part was wondering whether Laura was at the root of this talk.

"It is well that you have returned," Lobu spoke again, "for Patala is very angry."

Stephen judged it wise to say nothing to that.

"Well," he announced at length, "when I have washed then I am ready."

Lobu escorted him to the river where he stripped and refreshed himself, taking his time. He felt master of himself now, and allowed Lobu to conduct him to Patala.

On first entering the shelter it seemed almost as dark as the huts had been. Stephen could see little more of Patala than a large and shadowy outline

against a faintly luminous wall of twisted branches and covering leaves. Fingers of light poking through chinks touched startingly here and there on a fur pelt, a gold anklet, a scarlet shoulder-strap, a naked knee. The gloom was intensified by Stephen's captors congregating at the low doorway. He looked about him, but as no one offered him a stool he squatted on the ground facing Patala, also squatting. Lobu protested, but at a gruff word from his master allowed Stephen the privilege of sitting in the presence of majesty. He himself remained standing. Stephen took out his pipe ; merely as a gesture, because he knew his tobacco was too damp to burn. Lobu made a more emphatic protest, but was again restrained by Patala, who said in Japanese, "The white men do not understand politeness. But smoke will not blind our eyes."

Stephen filled his pipe, awed in spite of himself. There was a certain dignity in the rebuke, uttered slowly and quietly by a voice that threatened thunder, resonant but restrained like the soft premonitory throbbing of a war-drum. But his cue was to pit his English phlegm against the mere animal menace of an overbrowsing savagedom. His matches were too wet to strike, so he turned to Lobu and requested the loan of his box, making a pretence at lighting up but scrutinizing Patala during the momentary glow. He saw a bearded face with dark eyes intently regarding him, a wide forehead tattooed down the centre, thick brows, and a mass of dark hair encircled in a band of gold. Barbaric and constraining like an image in a temple, rigid, but with the immobility not of wood but of

a searching alertness. The match went out. The suddenly deepened gloom was like the anger of Patala of which Lobu had spoken closing palpably about him, impressing on his spirit the consciousness of a presence resolute and formidable confronting him unseen. "Imposing old humbug!" he muttered, trying to shake off the feeling of being mastered and subdued by that bearded barbarian who sat so immovably opposed to him with eyes that seemed to fix him through the gloom.

All the greater need to assert his ease.

He addressed Lobu again: "Excuse my rudeness, but my tobacco is also wet; and your tobacco is good, as I know."

Lobu hesitated. "Give the white boy tobacco," Patala said.

As Stephen struck his second match he kept his eyes on his pipe.

Patala began to question him through Lobu, speaking himself in his tribal tongue, Lobu interpreting in Japanese. The implied disdain roused Stephen to resentment, stimulating his defiance. After all he was playing for time. The police could not be far distant. An unworthy consideration, but comforting. Meanwhile he owed Patala a heavy vengeance, not merely personal but racial. To slight the old autocrat in the presence of his menials might be both amusing and profitable. So when Lobu interpreting said, "My master wishes to know of your journey," he answered, addressing Patala himself, "Of what use is it for me to speak? Do not the white men always tell lies?"

"Always, yet you must speak," Lobu said more menacingly.

"*Saa!* if like children it is a story that you desire I can tell you many things which you will not believe."

"We will know what to believe."

"Then let me not waste your honourable time by talking."

Lobu became imperative :

"Without more words tell my master of your journey."

"Why, I have climbed many mountains, and I have swum many rivers, but their names I cannot know."

"And the night before last night, where did you sleep?"

"How should I sleep where there is no bed? Your country is very beautiful, O Patala, but you have not taken thought for strangers who travel by night."

"Was your honourable bed not comfortable?"

"When the moon is high and the stars regard you it is difficult to sleep. And in my country we lie softly and with stretched-out limbs."

"This we know, and for white men we have provided even such a resting-place."

The mud!

Stephen was drawn up short in his bantering. Played so, the game was with his enemies. He must be rousing the suspicions he wished to allay.

"If you ask the men who found me, O Patala," he said, "they will tell you true, for I must confess

that your country confused me, and I do not rightly know what path I followed."

The three men were summoned into the shelter. At Lobu's bidding they seemed to be telling their story, Patala cross-examining them. They were dismissed, and the questioning began again :

"My master would know your name."

"Lest you should mistrust me let this speak for me," Stephen answered, drawing out his pocket-book and selecting a visiting-card, amused by the incongruity of this witness to a sophisticated etiquette in such a place. "It is very dirty," he added ; "please excuse me. Many times I have been wet with the river and the rain."

He presented it with both hands, leaning forward towards Patala. Lobu would have taken it, but Stephen refused it him, again offering it to Patala. Patala making no movement to receive it he laid it on the ground before him. Lobu stooped and picked it up, handing it to his master. It was not worth a further altercation.

Patala held the card where a ray of light fell upon it and seemed to be examining it minutely. Whether or not it meant anything to him Stephen could not judge. He showed no sign of comprehension or emotion. He returned it to Lobu without a word. Lobu examined it in the light of the doorway, turning it over and about, holding his head to one side and grinning. He exchanged a few words with Patala, and handing the card back to Stephen said, "My master is profoundly grateful, but wishes that you will speak your name."

Here was a chance of lingering out time. Stephen

took his pen and wrote his name down the card—the nearest phonetic approach to it—in Japanese Kata-Kana script : *Su-chee-hon Kaa-to-rai-to*. He bore, of course, his mother's name.—Then again laying the card down before Patala he said, "If the writing of the white men is not known to you, yet you will probably understand the writing of the *Nihonjin*, for do they not teach you in their schools?"

"If you speak so——," Lobu began angrily.

"Silence!" Patala cut him short.

Stephen was rejoiced, yet a little frightened, to feel Patala moved at last. There was a pause in which no one spoke; and the card lay untouched on the ground. At last Patala said, "Read the white boy's name."

Lobu reached for the card, and read as Patala had ordered him.

"*Kaa-to-rai-to*!" Patala repeated in his restrained deep voice.

A longer pause. Then Lobu, again interpreting, asked, "And the man in the cave, what is his name?"

"You must send a messenger and ask him."

"You will not say?"

"I will not say."

"Is it for fear, or is it for shame?"

"Perhaps, if I were not a white man, you would ask, Is it for honour?"

"However—you are a white man."

"A white man; I cannot change my skin, O Patala. There is no help!"

"There is no help!" Patala repeated softly.

"*Shigata ga nai*!"

He seemed to be falling into a meditation ; but he suddenly roused himself and put a further question.

“ The man below there, he is your father ? ”
Lobu interpreted.

“ Of the man below there I have nothing to say.”

“ And the woman ? ”

“ Such questions are fruitless.”

“ The woman has a gun.”

“ She has a gun.”

“ Then tell me, for what purpose have you come ? ”

“ Surely to visit a great chief.”

“ On such a visit is it necessary that you bring a gun ? ”

“ Your honourable question is full of an abundant humour, O Patala.”

“ Yet you, you carry no gun ? ”

It was Lobu still putting the questions, though Stephen insisted on addressing Patala :

“ It is well, or the number of your slaves would have diminished.”

Suddenly Patala addressed him direct :

“ White boy, you left your friends alone. Did you fear danger ? ”

Stephen was startled, but he answered with an effort at nonchalance, “ It is a rule with a white man that he shall consider himself alone.”

“ Enough ! ”

The single word rapped sternly out brought Stephen to an abrupt realization of his peril. This man was not to be trifled with. He was different from the others who could be cheated with tricks and mummery. Grown accustomed to the darkness

he could see Patala better now. A magnificent creature, a strenuousness in repose, as he squatted immovable with legs crossed and arms folded, his nude limbs displaying a superb curve of muscle, his head poised authoritatively on a powerful neck. And the spirit that animated the man seemed worthy of his girth. There was a force, an intelligence, a will, asserted and confirmed in every tone of his voice, every line of his face. He was a commander, absurdly circumscribed in this insignificant little tribe in subservience as they were to the Japanese ; but he was a commander of barbarians. He was limited there. In spite of his indisputable dominance there was a betraying ferocity which branded him of the savage ; a rancour, a fanaticism, shutting him from participation in the white man's trained liberality of mind.

“ *Tak'san !* ” A long pause followed the word, while Stephen studied Patala's face, attracted by the glamour of its poetry, repelled by its disfiguring malignancy. He could not take his eyes away. Something constrained him ; an admiration, a pity ; an emotion unnameable which was urging him to pour out the whole story from the beginning, its troubled moves, its complicated motives, to reveal the truth of his escape from the hollow and his fooling of the men sent to capture him, to advise him of the coming of the police, and finally to defy him. That above all : to defy him. The combat had been one of shifts and deceits and lies, unworthy of them both. He felt it like a need of the spirit to bring the battle to a clear issue. He

imagined himself saying, "You killed my father ; now kill me too.—But I shall fight !"

He began to speak, not knowing exactly what he intended to say : "Below there, there is a skeleton——."

Patala held up his hand, and Stephen fell silent. Patala gave a curt command to Lobu, who addressed Stephen : "So then, listen. My master wishes me to make all clear." He embarked on a narrative of events since Stephen's escape.

How his escape had been discovered Stephen could not quite determine. It seemed to have been less of a discovery than a surmise. Men had been despatched in pursuit, preceding Stephen, presumably, along the path before he reached the bridge. But he could reconstruct all that, and it did not interest him. He became more attentive when Lobu said, "In the morning my master arrived." Patala had been very angry to learn of Stephen's flight. He insisted that it was the old man who had "fled like a coward," and not the boy. It was impossible to convince him. He sent Lobu immediately to make certain, and to announce his coming. Lobu began to climb down to the cave, but was suddenly arrested by the woman calling to him to stop, threatening to shoot. Laura seemed to have fortified herself well, having piled up a barricade of rocks and stones leaving an aperture for firing. Through the chink Lobu could see the gun directed at him, and Laura's eyes behind : "and the gun did not tremble, and her eyes were steady." Even his smile was of no avail : "That white woman did not smile. She would have killed me. So I

returned to my master." Patala sent men from the other direction, but Laura commanded the ascent also ; and meanwhile time was passing. There had followed parleyings. Laura remained unshaken by promises or threats, refusing even to say who was in the cave with her, or whether there was anyone there at all. Twice Patala opened an intimidating fire from the cliffs, aiming wide, Lobu said, not to kill but to persuade : " but the white woman was stubborn, and refused to be persuaded." Noon came and passed. In the afternoon Lobu resorted to a bluff palaver from above, while men were sent round to steal up from below. He hailed Laura and began to reason with her. " You are one, but we are many," he said. " Soon we will come, and you cannot keep us away. Is it not better to yield now to my master's mercy ? " Laura answered, " You are many, but the path is narrow. You must come one by one, and I will shoot you as you come. Would it not be wiser for your master to yield to necessity ? " Not knowing the limits of her ammunition Lobu found the argument unanswerable, but he held her in talk to cover the manœuvre of his men. And it had nearly succeeded, he claimed. One man reached the barricade, but was driven back with a knife-wound deep in the shoulder. He recoiled, falling on to the men behind him. It was fortunate that they were not borne down and smashed on the rocks or swallowed in the mud. But the man had heard a voice from the cave, an old man's voice, so he declared. Even so Patala remained doubtful, feeling that his men wished only to pacify him and

would say whatever they knew would please. And these circumventing movements used up the hours. Evening fell.

It would have been possible to attack in the night, but Patala knew that even if he were successful he would lose men: "And my master is careful of his children. It would be a dishonour to be killed by a woman." It had not occurred, evidently, to the old savage to ask why Laura had used her knife and not her gun. But though he refrained from attacking, Patala was crafty enough to ensure that Laura should not sleep. He detailed men to creep about the cliff, to make the night uneasy with soft and insinuating noises. Lobu himself had ventured down to the platform and peered through the barricade. Laura seemed to have retreated into the cave beyond. It would have been a great deed to rush the entrance, "but such a doorway even a child could guard. And that white woman has an evil mind which a man may hear through her tongue. He who will wed her must surely do so for his punishment. And of what benefit would this Lobu be to his master if he should let a white woman kill him?" So Lobu had turned away; but he brought confirmation of a man's presence in the cave; an old man, "because he spoke like a child, angrily and without ceasing." Patala was reassured. After another day of watching the white woman must fall asleep. Time was of no account. He could wait.

And so the night had passed. But what a night it must have been for Laura! Moonless, so that she could not see; heavy with rain, holding her

acutely listening, deceiving her into alarm, confusing her hearing ; and her father in delirium ! While Stephen was lying bound on the pass.

Lobu was silent for a little, then he said, " And now you must bring the white girl away. Your life and her life my master does not desire. His business is with the man alone."

So that was the situation. It was clear at last, except for the nature of the business.

" And what is the business ? " Stephen asked.

" A matter from of old, but it is not for me to say."

Clearly Patala knew of Cartwright's earlier visit to his country. He had never forgiven him for carrying away his gold. Stephen remembered the skeleton in the cave. Was it Patala's intention to set Cartwright beside the other ? Was that to be the consummation of his vengeance ? . . . But what did it matter ? He could save himself and Laura if he sacrificed his uncle. As though that were to be considered for a moment ! Yet Patala in his confirmed contempt for the white man's honour was probably assuming that he would consent without scruple.

" And if I refuse to bring the white girl away ? " he asked.

" Then we shall bind you, and I shall carry you before me like a shield, and if the white girl shoots it will be you whom she will kill."

Stephen's blood ran cold as the dreadful alternative immediately pictured itself on his mind. It was impossible to think clearly. But one thing was clear : the responsibility would be on Laura. She must choose between her lover and her father.

And for himself, to be killed, in such a way, bound helpless, killed by Laura, in a few minutes it might be ! Rather than that let his uncle go to it ! But he could hear his uncle speaking, rapidly, mockingly, " But you'd stand by me. You can see yourself nobly dying, if need be, giving your life, your youth,—giving up the sun, eh?—for me ! " And even if he gave his youth would it save his uncle ? Yet to abandon him. . . . Here was the temptation at last. There could be nothing beyond this. Loyalty ! But what had that man done for him except to darken the world with the shadow of his ignoble self-contempt ? And was it through him that Patala had come to scorn the white man with such an insensate and fatal disdain ? Yet how could that be ? But to give his life for him, to give up the sun ? Rather, would the sun ever shine untroubled, for Laura or himself, until they were free of his perturbing contact ? Yet impossible to speak so to Laura. To accept life, love, as the reward of perfidy—she would never consent. And yet ; and yet. . . . Stephen suddenly saw himself cowering under the protection of Laura's conscience. But if it had been otherwise ? If he had had no stay but his own assurance of spirit ? He was wretchedly uncertain. . . .

There was a disturbance at the doorway. A girl pushed under Lobu's guard and threw herself on the ground beside Patala, caressing him. He put her gently aside, but surrendered a hand to her. She knelt up against him like a Japanese girl, fondling the captive hand which she held on her lap. Of course, the Princess Peepee.

There was a short altercation between Peepee and Lobu, but Peepee remained. For a little Stephen lost the drift of his troubled meditation gazing at the Princess, who now was also gazing at him. A child in her teens, vivid, alert, wild like an animal, girlhood untamed, yet with a fineness, an intensity, something that drew like a magnet and held like a trap ; eyes wide, lips apart, nostrils distended, as though absorbing him by her senses ; flowers in the black abundance of her hair, a profusion of necklaces that glittered, gold armlets, gold anklets ; a lithe and slender body implicit beneath the easy fall of her pelt ; the intoxicating enchantment of savagedom, but subtly spiritualized, invasive, irresistible. . . .

“ White boy, what do you say ? ” Lobu brought him back with a shock to actuality.

If he had been on his feet he might have made a leap for the door, gained the descent, and joined Laura in her barricade.

“ What do I say ? ” he repeated, pretending to misunderstand. “ Excuse my rudeness.” He rose and bowed ceremoniously to Peepee, wishing her an honourable good day. She inclined towards him, smiling delightedly.

“ What is your name ? ” she asked. She spoke in English.

“ *Damaré !* ” Lobu called her roughly to silence, while Patala’s hand on her lap clenched tightly about her fingers.

“ My name is Stephen,” he answered.

Her lips formed the name ; but feeling her error she had lost her mirth.

So Cartwright's warning not to speak in English had probably been justified. A Princess, her education would be well attended to. Lobu also, he was a Prince.

Words were passing between Lobu and Patala. It was easy to guess at their drift by the way Peepee clung to her father's hand and looked from one to the other with frightened eyes. Lobu ceased to smile, obviously aggrieved by his master's absurd and dangerous indulgence of a girl's whims. But meanwhile here was a diversion which might be turned to account. If only Stephen hadn't given away that pocket-mirror it might have come in useful now. But another plan was forming in his mind. He again requested Lobu for his matches. "Let me light my pipe," he said, "then I can think how to answer your question. During your interesting tale my tobacco forgot to burn."

Lobu looked across at Patala, who nodded shortly. He handed the box to Stephen, saying, "But you must think quickly." He folded his arms moodily, the picture of a wise counsellor slighted by a foolish monarch.

Stephen pretended to relight his pipe. Then turning to Peepee he said, speaking now in Japanese, "Have you ever seen such a thing as this?" Peepee drew herself up watching him attentively. Lobu glanced across at him in disdain. Stephen took out a match and closed the box, but not entirely, so that the heads of the matches showed bare. Then striking the match he let the flame touch at the exposed array of heads. The whole box went up in his hand in a single loud spurt of

flame. He tossed it into Lobu's face, and dipped through the door, running straight and hard for the top of the descent.

There was a sudden shouting to all sides of him. A couple of blows to right and left sent two savages rolling. He reached the top where the path fell over, calling wildly on Laura. But they dragged him back, hurling him to the ground and pinning him there helpless. He lay panting and cursing. A turn of the head showed him Patala at the door of the hut with a rifle to his shoulder ; and behind him Peepee looking under his arm. So then in any case it would have been useless. Yet better to have fallen so. Patala lowered the rifle and came towards him, leaving Peepee standing there alone. Then above him was the face of Lobu.

"Tell your master," Stephen said defiantly, "that I have thought ; and this is my answer."

They stood him to his feet as Patala approached. Patala surveyed him in silence for a few moments. Stephen faced him proudly, thinking, "I'll teach you to respect white men before I've done !" Patala gave a command, and turned away.

They bound him. Lobu, gripping him from behind by the arms, began to descend towards the platform, followed at a remove by a file of his tribesmen. When near the platform he halted. "Call the white woman," he said, "and tell her what we mean to do."

No need to call. Stephen could see Laura on guard behind the barricade, her gun covering them through the firing-hole.

"It's all up, Laura," he said. "They're going to rush you. Shoot ; and for God's sake shoot straight !" He spoke over his shoulder to Lobu, "I have given your message. The white woman will know what to do."

"You have not told all," Lobu said, making no pretence now to be ignorant of English. He called down to Laura, "He has not told all."

"Then what more is there ?" Laura's voice came in reply.

"An alternative," Stephen said. "To hand over your father."

"Then why didn't you tell me ?"

"Because for us it's no alternative."

"Stephen, are you still keeping something back ?"

He answered in French : "I evaded them, but they don't know it. The police must be on the way, but they are not here. Perhaps a few minutes ; perhaps a few hours. We may be able to play out time ; I think not. I ought to have waited, but I didn't wait. I sent the boy ; but for myself I had to return to you. It was foolish perhaps. Yet something drew me back ; a scruple I can't explain. I think you understand."

He was conscious of speaking confusedly, though struggling for mastery.

Laura said, "Yes, I understand."

"It's that thing that's always followed us, Laura," Stephen broke out passionately, speaking in English now. "It's been too strong for us. You said so yourself. Didn't you prophesy this ? Something terrible. . . . But don't flinch. Shoot

straight. And don't hesitate or they'll be on you. They've got a fine idea that we've got livers the colour of our faces. It'll be something to teach them what it is to act white. That bloodthirsty old ruffian—is he watching us ? ”

“ Yes, he's up there.”

“ And the girl ? ”

“ Yes, the girl too.”

“ Well, we'll show them, Laura. Perfidious Albion, eh ? They thought they'd merely got to put their terms to us for us to hand over the old man and wave them adieu. ‘ Your life and the woman's life my master does not desire. His business is with the man alone.’ You may as well have the exact words. To tell the truth we've been having a jolly old pow-wow. I nearly got through too. If we had another half-hour of life I could tell you some merry tales. But you must have had a rotten time last night, old thing.”

“ Yes, pretty rotten.”

“ Well, don't funk it now. I'll give them the word in a minute. You said we should find ourselves here. Pretty drastic it's been. Do you think your father had this sort of end in mind ? But better than his sort of end, anyway. When a candle's out, best for it to stop smoking too. Well, it'll save us from that. And we couldn't give him up, could we, Laura ? ”

“ You said yourself there was no alternative.”

“ Did I ? Yes, I thought it out pretty carefully, though I was rather pressed for time. If we turned back and left him we should never forgive ourselves. But Lobu's getting tired holding me. If

you had any sense of humour you'd laugh to see me propped up like this. Your father says the gods laugh. Curse them ! Look at that blue sky, Laura ! ”

“ Stephen, hadn't you better give the word ? ”

“ If we were Christians it would be *au revoir* ! but I'm afraid it isn't even *adieu* ! It's simply Good-bye ! And that beastly song of yours, you know. I can't get it out of my head : *It may be for years, and it may be forever*. Forever, this time ! Well, shoot straight ; and no delay. You must obey your final orders ! After that you'll know what to do.”

“ When does all this talk end ? ” Lobu asked.

“ When ? Now ! ” Stephen cried. “ Advance, Lobu ; the white woman is ready ! ”

Lobu advanced. Stephen tried to face the gun without flinching, but his eyes wavered unsteadily. There was a sudden detonation ; a cry from the barricade. Missed ! Impossible ; yet he was untouched, alive, swept forward by Lobu down the cliff, carried bodily through a confusion of tumbled stones as, using him for a ram, Lobu charged the barricade, thrown violently to the ground amid a trampling of feet, shouts, howls. He lay bruised, shaken, half stunned, muttering, “ Missed, by God ! Missed ! ”

A hand touched him. It was Laura who knelt over him. “ Forgive me, Stephen,” she said. “ It was father. He must have heard us. I left him asleep inside ; quite helpless, I thought. But he must have heard us. He sprang on me from behind.”

Stephen slowly sat up ; but he couldn't trust himself to speak.

The platform, strewn with the wreckage of the barricade, was filled with men grouped about Cartwright who lay on the ground with his head and shoulders supported against the rock, for all the world as though he hadn't moved since Stephen left him. Lobu stood by examining the revolver which presumably he had captured during the struggle between Laura and her father. Cartwright looked across at Stephen, feebly lifted a hand in acknowledgment, and smiling weakly said, " Noble effort, old chap ! Pity to have interfered ! But I couldn't let that pass, you know." Lobu cut in with a sharp command. The men drew back, ranging themselves behind him. Patala had arrived. He stood for a moment looking down at the wretched man he had been at such pains to capture, and said in English, " So, Cartwright, we meet again ! "

Cartwright lifted a strangely radiant face, and bracing himself to a more upright attitude against the rock answered, but more to himself than to Patala, " After all then—I was right. . . . Spender. . . ."

PART VI

CHAPTER XXIV

SO Spender was still alive ! His father ! The revelation was dazing to Stephen like a physical shock. His mind refused to adjust itself immediately to the changed situation. How could it be true ? Lobu's story. . . . That skeleton. . . . Yet looking at Patala's face he could see in it a ferocious degradation of the features he had studied so well in his father's picture which he carried. But the matter now had passed beyond his power. They were spectators merely, he and Laura—Laura with her cheeks pinched and her eyes ringed darkly from watching. So Spender was still alive !

Cartwright and Spender. . . .

Stephen had heard the names so often coupled ; but seeing the men now as they faced each other the names were powerless to evoke the old emotion. Cartwright sat propped like an invalid with his back against the rock, his clothes crumpled, his hair in disorder, his pallid and sunken face scrubby with a three days' growth of whisker, his loose-hanging lips uncertainly twitching, his eyes still bloodshot from delirium ; a husk sucked dry of manhood, a wastage, a decay. And at a little remove stood Spender, arms folded, gazing contemptuously down at him, magnificent and malign ; gold around his head, gold around his wrists, gold embossing the rich scarlet shoulder-strap which retained the

pelt above his kilt, a gold-handled knife showing at his waist ; his face bearded, and like his naked arms, his naked legs, tanned with the sun ; a splendid savage, with the mark of savagedom branded into his brow, like a trophy set there as though in conscious repudiation of the white in him ; virile and superb, but a reversion, a negation, a betrayal.

Cartwright essayed a smile, achieving a distortion : “ You must excuse me, old man ; I’m not exactly fit to see visitors. You might send your barber along.” He stroked his stubbly chin.

“ It is true, I find you—changed,” Spender answered, his words coming with a certain difficulty.

He spoke shortly to his men. With the exception of Lobu they filed past him and disappeared up the cliff. Lobu drew near to the cousins, and squatting on his heels began to chew betel. Spender alone remained standing.

“ It would be interesting to know—what you have to say,” he addressed Cartwright.

“ Ah, volumes ! ” Cartwright exclaimed almost jocularly. “ Been saying it for the last twenty years, old man, and not exhausted yet.”

“ Yes,” said Spender, “ you always could—talk ! ”

“ But the audience was all wrong,” Cartwright continued, not heeding him. “ Want one want all ! Sounds like a proverb, eh ? Or a love-letter reduced to a telegram ? Sign of a bad conscience, of course—talking, I mean. It’s the special function of the tongue to betray. When a fellow’s always on the prattle—like a buzzing of flies, you know ;

sure proof of something rotten. Something desperately rotten—spiritual garbage ; nothing to touch that for reek ! . . . But look here, I'm not making excuses. I'll let you have the truth all right. But my head's a bit hazy. If you don't mind my tongue wagging, something'll come of it. And you always could—listen ! By the way, you've got a curious accent on you, Spender. Been to school with the Japanese ? ”

Spender didn't answer ; but Lobu spoke up :

“English is language of royal family. Papa Patala teach it his loving children. We have many secret conversation so.”

“Sound scheme !” Cartwright rejoined. “Keeps out the moth and rust. And is this the Princess ?”

Peepee had stolen down the cliff unnoticed. She slipped a hand under her father's elbow and stood pressing herself to his side.

“My daughter—Peepee,” said Spender.

Cartwright gazed at the girl for a while, then said in a changed tone, “You know, old man, that hurts. There's a condemnation there. I refer entirely to myself. To rule—you were born to it, —or to pitch your tent here, all right ; but to build ! I never pictured you as dug in. Dug in ! My God ! Not in that way !”

“You thought I was dead.”

“Dead ? That's a word that shifts its meaning as a fellow gets older. Buried ; that's clear. But ~dead ? I've been dead twenty years, but my body's been tied round my neck. That's worse than an albatross ! You remember the Ancient Mariner ? There's another talker. A rotting conscience

engenders gas. How is it you can keep so quiet, Spender ? ”

“ My conscience——”

“ Quite ! Of course ! You’re not the soil that doubt breeds in. Yet—in all that toggery ; it’s difficult to recognize you. Rather melodramatic, don’t you think ? Byronic, perhaps ? But what’s bothering me is, how you came to take to it. Are you sure you’re as alive as you think you are ? Pardon my asking, but my wits aren’t as clear as they should be. There’s a confounded noise in my ears, and things dance. It is you, I suppose ? ”

“ Yes, it is me.”

“ Well, we’ll posit that to begin with, otherwise we might as well knock out our pipes and go to bed. And I suppose you chew betel too, like this ruffian of yours here ? No offence, old man ; it’s my own sore I’m chafing. I want to get clear just what I’ve done. Because I’m judge and jury in this affair. I’ll relieve you of that responsibility. I merely want you as witness, if you don’t mind. And that girl—beg pardon, Her Royal Highness ! I won’t call on her to speak ; but let her stay there, just as she is. She’s not hallucination anyway, whatever the rest may be. And simply her presence, that’ll hold me to the truth. So you’re still alive, Spender ? ”

“ Still alive, Cartwright.”

“ Well, blind men move in a circle ; and when you’re bound to the wheel of necessity you’re blind enough. So here we are again, just where we left off.”

“ No, not where we left off.”

“ True for you, Spender. Not where we left off. Leagues and millenniums away. In the world of ghosts, in fact. Because you’re as dead as I am, Spender. And it was I who killed you ! ”

Cartwright was growing more excited as he talked. Spender standing motionless, answering shortly in a deliberate and distinct enunciation, seemed waiting for Cartwright to exhaust himself before putting out his strength. Dominant and implacable, he was assured of victory against an adversary who seemed playing for defeat. And yet in Cartwright’s buoyant irony was the suggestion of an unexpected reserve. To Stephen listening there was no predictable issue, just as—with Spender alive—there was no comprehensible motive for the conflict.

“ It was I who killed you ! ” Cartwright repeated more quietly.

He began to mop his face, streaming with perspiration. Laura rose, and re-erected the covering above him—displaced during the assault—so as to screen him from the sun. Little round holes, showing through it here and there where Patala’s persuasive fire had pierced it, left spots of vivid light on Cartwright’s shaded figure. Laura settled herself beside her father, and gazed across at Peepee.

“ My daughter—Laura.”

Spender made the least inclination of the head. Peepee’s lips moved, shaping the name.

“ Spender, old man,” Cartwright suddenly asked, “ do you believe in—resurrection ? ” Without waiting for an answer he hurried on, “ Not after death—theology isn’t my line ; or teleology is it ?—

but here and now? Not for dead bodies, but for dead souls? For instance, for you and me? To come to life again—is it possible?”

“I don’t think I understand you.”

“No? Well, never mind. It’s a dream; in other words, a weakness. I could tell you a lot about dreams. I sat at the feet of Daniel for a couple of weeks. When you’re in a den of lions you dream of a miraculous deliverance—the Angel-of-the-Lord sort of thing—because you daren’t face up to the jaws of the brutes. Something of that kind. And Daniel ought to know. A weakness, you see. So then, no resurrection. Is the argument clear?”

“If it pleases you to talk—I have time.”

“No resurrection. And the alternative—annihilation. Yet I’m not sure that that’s not a dream too. It promises forgetfulness, which seems too generous a boon to ask of heaven. Such a heaven as ours! To forget? That’s hardly expiation. I suppose one must earn forgetfulness like any other privilege. My God! But how to earn it? Because I thought you were dead. And dead, you troubled me. You can’t reason with a dead man. Can’t plead with him. Yet that’s what I came for—to earn forgetfulness.”

“Do you mind—speaking clearly?”

“The judge and jury can follow all right. Still—yes; I’ll speak clearly.” He faced Spender steadily, and added, “I never returned for you—because I was afraid.”

Never returned!

Stephen controlled an exclamation, looking

dazedly from one to the other of the two men. The vengeance of a faith betrayed ! the phrase came to him from somewhere. But the second revelation was not so bewildering as the first.

“ You were afraid ! ”

The tonelessness of Spender's voice was more menacing than anger, more withering than contempt. Stephen shrank appalled from this man whom he could not in his soul acknowledge as his father. The reality superimposed on the ideal refused to blend to a single portrait.

“ God, old man ! You can be cruel ! ”

The words, spoken almost in a whisper, were yet like a cry. They were swallowed into a long silence in which the heat and heavy quietude lay like a burden on the spirit. The very air seemed tainted by the emanation of this old dead friendship decomposing into remorse and hate.

“ Yes, afraid,” Cartwright began again. “ You never knew fear. Well, it's an experience, and without it the soul's not complete. So I score on you there. There's a fascination in submitting to it. You never understood that. Excitement—that's as near as you got. But fear's another matter. It disintegrates. And I tell you that's good for you—in moderate doses. You can settle back more fluidly into a freer mould. And isn't that life ? Redistribution, recombination. Chemical, spiritual ; which ? I don't know. Is there a distinction anyway ? But sometimes you don't settle back. And then even God can't help you. Because you're another creature, compounded to a different formula. Generous folk call you mad. You see, old man,

if it's vengeance you're after—or shall we call it justice?—your victim's escaped you. The man who did you that wrong has ceased to be.”

“Subtle !”

“No, not subtle ; but very much troubled. You see, I'm out for justice too. And I belong to the old school ; I believe in punishment. If you want a proof of God's beneficence you'll find it in hell, not heaven. Let a man suffer for what he's done, and at least he remains a man. But issue him with a pair of wings, and you won't convert him into a presentable dodo. And if I could lay my hands on that man who betrayed you, with his capacity for suffering unimpaired, you should have him. You should have him ! Because I tell you”—his voice rose passionately—“the punishment has fallen on the innocent. And that's good theology. Because this world isn't governed by the justice of man—another dream !—but by the justice of the Jealous God !”

He sat up breathing hard, his face working, his fists clenched. Laura laid a hand compositely on his arm. He leant back against the rock, exhausted by his emotion. Spender remained unmoved.

“The Jealous God !” Cartwright repeated, gasping a little. “The sins of the parents ! Well, that's a law of nature too. Nothing particularly mystic there. Yet it's damnable all the same. But if man isn't out to clip nature's claws and put a muzzle over her snout, let's fiddle back Sodom and Gomorrah again and all go down merrily in fire and brimstone ! Nature ? But who invented the bit and rein ? Still an idealist, you see.”

“Yes—I see!”

“Don’t be so cursed hard, Spender. An idealist, I insist on it. Or what do you think I’m here for, eh? A passion for ethnology? Photographs? Gold? I’ve had my fill of gold.”

“Then in your fear—you did not also abandon the gold?”

Abandon! The word laboriously searched for was flourished in triumph, like a trump.

Cartwright seemed puzzled for a moment to understand the question. Then as though suddenly enlightened he cried, “Please don’t make me laugh, old man. Spare me that. Under the circumstances it would be out of place. Abandon the gold? No, as it happened I forgot to. Found I still had it with me when I got home. Sort of stuff you don’t notice, gold! Yes, I see now. But that’s as comic a notion as you could have pitched on. Honestly, was that how it seemed to you? That I’d cleared off and left you to it—for the gold? Well, that’s really funny. I betrayed you, Spender; but not like Judas. Like Peter, perhaps, but not like Judas. You see, I haven’t hanged myself. Not that I’ve never contemplated it. But even suicide should be profitable. And that sort of stupid end—merely to escape—all right for a man in a spiritual blind alley. Like Judas, for instance. But not for me. A lane without a turning needn’t be a cul-de-sac. And that was my case. No evading necessity, I knew; but if I followed far enough I should get somewhere. You see, I’ve got back here. And what do you think brought me? Not merely a guilty conscience. Though,

mind you, even a guilty conscience is a conscience. No, I came to throw the gauntlet to the Jealous God ! ”

He paused, as though expecting Spender to speak, and continued :

“ These things can’t be put into words. I didn’t intend to talk. Yet there are still things to say. This journey ; for us it was always a pilgrimage. And a pilgrimage leads to a tomb ! Yours or mine, Spender ? Or both ? Well, I thought you were dead. That is, until Gregory showed me your picture. You know, they sell it in the shops in Taihoku : ‘ Chief of Barbarian.’ How did they manage to get it, eh ? Gregory never suspected, though he’s seen you too. But I knew you. And all the past awoke and howled after me like a hunt. I couldn’t face it. My purpose had been confession, I think. And that can be a bitter pill. But with you still alive, Spender ! I went to pieces. Fear again. Then after that other things happened, which frightened me back to shape. And suddenly I felt a great hope. Human justice, not divine spite ! It was like a battle-call. The sublime conception of the whipping-boy belongs to royalty and deity. Let it belong. I saw things arranging themselves otherwise. No, not a reconciliation with sobs and embraces ! We’ve agreed that there’s no resurrection, you remember. Not confession and absolution ! Not even expiation ; though something akin to it. The great thing was, to make an end. You see, not nature’s way ; not God’s way ; but man’s way. Let the dead bury their dead. Make an end. But then,

that—thing—in the cave there ! Was it put there purposely to confuse me ? I was in no state to reason the matter. The evidence contradicted me. I had been yielding to a dream. How could you be alive ? How could that have been your picture ? Even Gregory who had seen you—and so forth. The hope that had sustained me went out like a lamp. There could be no end. The victory was with the Jealous God. The living would be haunted forever by the relentless malice of the dead. . . . But after all, you are alive ! ” His voice woke to a brighter tone. “ And there must be an interesting story at the back of that. How did it come about, Spender ? ”

“ Has Lobu not told you ? ”

“ Lobu ? Oh, ay, he was yarning the other night. But I missed it. Can't we have it over again ? ”

Lobu grinned upon the company, and said, “ I think I telled a very clever lie. ” He paused for effect, and added, “ Only one matter needs to add. Yet to wise men is it not clear ? ”

“ I was in the cave ten days, ” Spender said, beginning to explain. He spoke slowly, feeling for his words, like a man anxious to avoid the snares of a strange idiom. There was something pathetic in his laboured caution as in the efforts of a convalescent discarding crutches. Cartwright hung his head, as though his friend's halting speech carried a reproach in it which touched acutely at his conscience. “ I had no more food, but at night I crept out to drink. I used to hear noises, and men passing ; but I thought that was my weakness.

I saw visions too, and many things that were not there. Three times, Cartwright, you returned to me ; but when I tried to lean on you I fell." He breathed deeply, and continued : " Then one night a boy came creeping into the cave. I could see him clearly because the darkness had become daylight to me. But I thought he too was a dream. After him came a man, also creeping, who began to follow the boy. He had a knife in his teeth. I sat quite still, not knowing whether awake or asleep. The man took the knife in his hand and lifted it, intending to kill. I shot him. . . . There is the boy." He pointed to Lobu. " Need I continue ? "

He asked the question angrily as though conscious that by talking he had lost prestige.

" I think not," Cartwright answered. " So they took you to their bosom for saving the boy. Lucky you picked on the right one, eh ? Was he a prince by any chance ? "

" Yes—a prince."

" Splendid ! I seem to remember something of the yarn now. There had been battles, hadn't there ? And the father was killed ? So they made you chief. Or that came later ? Never mind. It was inevitable. And the fellow in there, he ought to have been the chief of the enemy to complete the picture."

" He was."

" Better and better ! How do you do it, Spender ? And don't you see how I should have spoilt it all if I'd come back ? . . . But why didn't you follow me ? I hadn't gone far."

"That I knew."

"You knew? And you let me go?"

"I let you go."

Cartwright looked sadly up at Spender, but refrained from comment. "Then tell me, old man," he asked, "what have you been doing all this time?"

"Cursing you!"

"Ah!"

"Not vainly, I think."

"No, not vainly. Be assured of that. I am—what you see me. Does it please you?"

"Immensely!"

"You find it a satisfying life's work to have produced—this?"

Cartwright waved a limp hand to indicate his debility. Spender didn't answer. Cartwright continued, speaking more quietly:

"Sorry if I seem to be reproaching you. How can I convince you that it's myself I'm punishing? It's a necessity just now that I should face the full consequences of what I've done. Punishment is meaningless unless it follows conviction. And all your wasted life! If you're proud of your work I'm not proud of mine. Would to God you had been killed, Spender! I don't care how horrible a death; but killed. But I'm beginning to see. And I came in hope! Actually in hope! Now, I don't know. The forces of this world are too strong for a fellow. I believed—but I'm not asking for forgiveness. The word means nothing. But I'm asking you to retract that curse."

"Impossible!"

"Don't say impossible till you know what I

mean." He spoke with a restrained urgency, sorrowful and appealing. "For your own sake I'm beseeching you to breathe air once more instead of poison. Is it too late? If so I'm punished home. Because your curse doesn't end with me. Not even with yourself. It's for others——."

"Stop!"

Spender lifted an authoritative hand. His eyes took in Stephen and Laura with an atrocious malignancy.

"You mean these," he said. "My curse is on them too!"

"But do you understand?"

"Yes, I understand."

Cartwright's head drooped. "Then I should never have spoken," he said.

"Yes, please speak—all you will."

Cartwright laughed faintly, cynically: "It sounds sweet to you, of course. You feel your power. I understand that."

There seemed no hope of an issue to the combat, no word that might harmonize this feverish loquacity and ferocious taciturnity. And to those who listened it was cruel and profitless, but inevitable like a natural force set in motion, oppressing the spirit with the sense of something too powerful for pathos, too bitter for tragedy. It was beyond interposition, like the last stages of a disease, like the cries from a ship perishing out of reach of aid.

Cartwright gathered energy again:

"Look here, Spender, this won't do. After all, what does your cursing amount to? We don't live in the days when a man would seriously torture

the effigy of his enemy. Yet perhaps you've been on to that too. Have you got me slowly melting in wax somewhere, or smouldering in straw? But there's one thing certain about a curse; it comes back like a boomerang. Aren't you a proof of that? If your dead youth could rise from the grave and look at you, do you think you'd own yourself? God! can't I see it all, the last twenty years? You've lived for vengeance. And by all accounts you've had it. If the mud there could speak, eh? But how has it helped you? Because I failed you is there nothing white? If I go in up to the knees must you go in up to the neck? One coward doesn't make an army of deserters. And by God, you've had the proof of it! Not an hour ago. These two didn't fail. Did they accept your terms, eh? You were beaten there, old man. Smashed! Routed! All you've stood for for the last twenty years, that one moment gave it the lie. Be just now. Confess. It was worth seeing, wasn't it, even at the price of a philosophy. 'Shoot!' he said. And she would have shot—she did shoot—but I spoilt her aim. If you're beyond appreciating that, you're beyond hope. Confess now. That at least was pure white!"

"The proof is yet to come."

"Very well, then. I've done. But you might mention the conditions."

Cartwright, aroused for the moment to enthusiasm, sank wearily back again.

Spender looked silently round on his prisoners.

"The conditions; yes. I offered these their freedom. They rejected. So we reverse. You

are free, Cartwright, but these—remain with me.”

“Magnificently conceived, Spender!” Cartwright cried. “You punish like a god! I am free—till memory haunts me into madness! A Puritan couldn’t imagine a more excellent hell! If only you could curse me into everlasting life, now! So, these remain, and I am free? My God!” he suddenly laughed, “I accept!”

“You accept!”

“Damn it, you repeat me like a conscience! Yes, I accept. Free? Don’t you understand, as a prisoner the door’s bolted against a fellow. And the door’s been bolted long enough. Too long. Have I ever had a chance since that day? But now! You’re a magician, Spender. You confer the impossible—the second chance! Fear, remorse, these circumscribe a man. But now my judgment’s my own. Free! I could never be free till the circle completed itself. And then if you had dropped me into the mud—along with the others—that would have been the end. But now I can begin again. And you mean it? I can really go?”

“You must go.”

“Must? Better yet!”

He struggled up, Laura supporting him.

“You set an old crock on his legs again,” he said.

The radiance with which he had first greeted Spender came back to his face, the exaltation of that night under the moon came back to his voice; enhanced, yet sobered. He stood up now facing his old friend.

“We’ve known some wonderful days, Spender,

but nothing so wonderful as this. Perhaps nothing so happy even. It puts a premium on failure. And you'll come to see it, I know. We played for a great stake together. Well, after all we've won. I assure you, this is victory. I suddenly find myself with an immense faith. You doubt still ; but you've never really suffered. Your pride has been a wine for you. You've been intoxicated with your hate. You've revelled in it, not suffered. But suffering may come to save you ; you must hope. But I feel myself already among the elect. . . . So, good-bye !”

He held out his hand, his face lit with an enigmatic smile, strangely ethereal.

Spender maintained his arms folded.

“You cannot walk. Lobu will carry you,” he said. “But you must go—now.”

“Yes, now,” Cartwright repeated. “But I'm sorry you won't shake. You'll be sorry too some day. Some day when you're wiser. Because you seem to me like a little child, Spender, magnificently in the tantrums. You've been sinking into babyhood all these years while I've been ripening into a Nestor. But time will deal with you as it's dealt with me.”

He stood looking at his friend for a little, steadily and appraisingly. He put out a hand and felt the muscles of the folded arms. Then he turned to the cousins :

“Good-bye, Stephen. Good-bye, Laura. Don't you have any fear. You've stood the proof. The worst's passed.”

Stephen rose and joined him. Holding them each

by an arm as he stood between them Cartwright continued, "You won't need to forgive me for bringing you here. You've dug down to something better than gold. And I told you I'd show you where it started. You probably understand. You must face up to it. And you will—I know you will. Then you won't think too hardly of me. He saved others—excuse me if it sounds blasphemous ; but the son of man is always the Son of Man !—himself he could not save."

He took them by the hands. His grip tightened tremblingly. They stood looking down, not daring to meet each other's eyes.

"Is Lobu ready?" he asked.

They turned to see.

He broke from them, and calling a last "Good-bye!" staggered across the platform. With his face buried in his arms, and his body seeming to crumple helplessly upon itself, he slowly toppled over the cliff.

They leapt to the edge, clutching after him. But too late. They clung together, peering over, watching him as he fell. Twice his body struck the rocks, and was received into the mud as into a suddenly opened mouth softly closing him under. The single loud slap of the impact struck sharply at their ears. The disturbed surface settled slowly back to smoothness. . . .

A curt word from Spender brought them facing round.

His body had not moved, but his face was livid with anger. Peepee, terrified, was making quietly away. Lobu, looking foolish, shuffled back from

the cliff edge, having leapt there after the cousins to see the white man fall. At a nod of the head from Spender he followed behind Peepee, but returned to hand his master the revolver which he still carried. Spender took it, letting it lie for a minute in the palm of his hand. Then opening it, and seeing two unspent cartridges, he looked swiftly across at Stephen and Laura. But with a snap he closed it again, and tossed it contemptuously over the cliff.

"As for you two, you remain," he said.

Stephen stepped up to him as he was turning away. The words flooding at his lips rendered him speechless.

"Well?" Spender asked, facing him over his shoulder.

"You damned renegade!" was all Stephen could say.

He felt Laura drawing at his arm; but Spender's suddenly inflamed brow set him hysterically laughing. He snapped his fingers full in his father's face.

"Smashed! Routed!" he cried, using Cartwright's words.

The next minute he was alone with Laura. Spender removed, his puerile vindictiveness evaporated in shame. He submitted to Laura's leading. Without a word spoken they retired to the shelter of the cave, and lying down beside each other surrendered to their fatigue.

CHAPTER XXV

IT was already evening when Stephen awoke. Laura was still asleep. He left her undisturbed, and going outside began to prepare a meal. In a little she joined him, blinking at the light, and rubbing the sleep out of her eyes. "Good boy!" she exclaimed, seeing him busied by the fire; "I'm as empty as a bad nut." She sat down with a sigh beside the bowl he had filled for her, and set to ravenously without a further word.

When she had finished she looked across at Stephen, blushing a little. "What a complete pig!" she said, stretching back, and supporting herself on her arms braced behind her, in the attitude of a holiday-maker by the sea.

"Fattened for the slaughter!" Stephen rejoined with a smile.

She was immediately grave, drawing herself forward again. "Poor old dad!" she said softly, with a half glance towards the pool.

They talked brokenly, with long pauses, fitting the confused events into place like the pieces of a puzzle. Stephen outlined his adventure, dwelling more on his perplexities than his perils. Laura would say little of her long vigil. "I watched and waited," she summed up her story; and quoted Lobu: "A woman has no deeds."

"Fortunately I know how to believe you," Stephen smiled appraisingly back at her. "Holding up an army of head-hunters with a revolver is a simple feat of abstraction ; and dancing under a Formosan sun a pure form of meditation ! Essence of Buddhism, in fact. By the way, how long did you stick it ?"

"Not quite long enough, unfortunately," she told him. "I suddenly heard father calling to me. He thought we had deserted him."

"Well, he told us to."

"Yes—he told us to. . . ."

"Papa Patala must have been pretty huffy when he saw he'd been held up by three cartridges and a girl !" Stephen laughed. "Oh yes, and a knife !" he added. "I think you're perfectly magnificent, Laura. But he seems to have peppered you." He looked up at the holes in the blanket above them.

"Um !" Laura refused to be drawn.

"You know," she suddenly said, "father thought he had told us."

"How do you mean ?"

"About his not returning."

"I rather gathered so," Stephen answered meditatively. "Certain things he said that first morning here. I felt there was more to come. So he thought he had told us ? Well, that makes it easier to forgive."

"Forgive ?" Laura challenged him sharply.

"Sorry. I should have said understand. God knows I don't judge him, Laura. I've had some myself. A mere fraction—but enough."

The evening was gathering rapidly about them, isolating them on their narrow margin of rock.

"I wonder that the police don't come," Stephen said.

"Do you want them to come?" Laura asked.

"The one half of me does," he confessed.

"That was a dreadful mistake," she said. "We might have guessed, you know. I mean, about the skeleton. After you had gone it suddenly occurred to me to examine the thing, because I was puzzled that Lobu should take a white man's head. Your father had broken his leg, you remember. I found that wasn't your father, and then everything was clear. Even to dad's not returning. Because he talked while you were away."

"Delirium?" Stephen asked.

"Well—he talked."

"So you weren't surprised to see—Patala?"

"Of course, I couldn't foresee the end."

"The end!"

They sat silent, while the darkness deepened.

"You know," Stephen began again, "people talk of suicide as though it's a cowardly thing. Let them try it! A drop like that!"

"Suicide?" said Laura. "But that was sacrifice."

"Ah! I was thinking of the physical act."

"But that spoils everything. The physical act—if it isn't ludicrous, it's disgusting."

"My God, Laura!" Stephen exclaimed. "It's easy to see whose daughter you are!"

"On the whole," she said slowly, "I'm proud of it."

He leaned across and pressed her hand.

It was quite dark now. Stephen replenished the dying fire. The light set Laura's face in relief, accentuating the hollows of her wasted cheeks.

"If Lobu were here he might tell us a story."

"Another very clever lie, perhaps."

The pauses became longer, the talk more desultory. They were both of them conscious of avoiding the main issue. An unwary word, and they might find themselves at grips like Cartwright and Spender. The moon rose.

"It's a pity that Peepee must marry Lobu."

"You like Peepee?"

"She has a savour."

"But Lobu at least is—loyal."

"I don't fancy him as a brother-in-law."

"Ah! I had forgotten the relationship."

"In other circumstances, Laura, I believe I should press it."

"Are you trying to make me jealous?"

"Jealous of a half-sister?"

"No; jealous of a—savour."

Stephen laughed; but Laura's next question sobered him:

"Do you think you were quite fair to your father?"

It was like the joining of battle.

"There I'm prepared to defend myself," he retorted, speaking with a sudden passion. "If you consider spite a worthy motive——."

"Spite!" Laura repeated. "Be careful how you throw stones."

The rebuke went home like a knife. Spite!

That night at Tokyo ! Throw stones ! Was Spender's blood as strong in him as Cartwright's was in Laura ?

" Well, at any rate," he grumbled, " I refuse to own him. And it's lucky my name is Cartwright."

" Stephen," Laura spoke with a sharp questioning, " do you mean to say that you haven't told him ? That he doesn't know ? "

" He thinks we're brother and sister."

" But that's not right. It isn't giving him a chance."

" Let him act on principle, not sentiment."

" I'm not sure that one can distinguish. And it doesn't matter. What does matter is that he ought to have his chance."

" Do you want me to go to him and say, ' Please spare my life because I'm your son ? ' "

" Yes, if you could do so for his sake and not your own."

Stephen laughed shortly : " If I had the conscience of a Jesuit and the brain of a sophist ! "

" My dear boy, you're running amok. You're angry with your father because he's done violence to your ideal. He isn't what you thought he was. But he may have been so once. Perhaps more than you thought him. And if he isn't so still, isn't it because—some one—did violence to *his* ideal ? Try and judge him a little more dispassionately. You can forgive my father ; why not your own ? "

" But to sulk for twenty years, Laura ! "

" But if I suddenly failed you ? Wouldn't that knock the bottom out of things ? "

Stephen still held out : " I wouldn't throw in my lot with a horde of betel-chewing head-hunters ! "

" Not even if they had a—savour ? "

Stephen capitulated on a frank laugh.

" But are we really getting anywhere ? " he asked.

" We've problems of our own to solve."

" If we can understand—them—I think we shall understand each other."

" Find ourselves, in fact. Didn't you say so, Laura ? "

They were quiet again for a while.

" I suppose," Stephen suggested at last, " it would be impossible to make a second get-away."

" But would you even consent to attempt it ? "

" You mean—we don't put up a fight ? "

" Stephen, you've been a dear good boy ; don't fail me at the end."

" But—whatever have you got in mind ? "

It was her turn to lean across and press his hand.

" The end ? " he repeated. " Haven't we seen the end ? Your father—well. . . . And mine, incorrigible. Their story's done. Have we no right to consider ourselves ? "

" We don't belong to ourselves."

" How then ? "

" We belong to your father."

His prisoners ? But Laura didn't mean that. Her tone puzzled him, alarmed him. He became suddenly conscious of the night about them, of their enemies above, of the mud below. He could almost see Lobu grinning from the shadows, saying, " This is a place which puts fear into a

man till the desire of death comes upon him." And to remain here inactive, submissive, tangled in a net of memories and wrongs! Haunted by the ghost of that old betrayal, how should they hold true? True to themselves, true to each other. Because that was the point where all focused. Loyalty! Of what avail was that tragic expiation if it were possible still to be disloyal? Yet it was alarmingly possible. The shadow of Cartwright had yielded to the shadow of Spender. The feud remained unappeased. . . .

"Look here," Stephen broke into their long silence, "we've got to get this clear. We came here blindly enough, but we must use our own eyes now. If Patala—we'll call him Patala—decides to throw us over the cliff, well, that'll end it; we can't resist. And if he leaves us here to eat our hearts out we can't do much either; though it's a pretty horrible prospect. But suppose we're rescued, what then?"

"You're still thinking of the police?"

"Hang it, Laura, the chances are that they'll soon be here anyhow. Are we to pretend that they're not coming?"

"We can hope that they're not coming."

"You honestly hope that?"

"Honestly, Stephen, I do."

"But don't you see?" He became more petulant. "It's not going to do us much good to be killed. And I tell you, I don't want to be killed. I've learnt enough wisdom now to make a success of my life. A real success; something strong and beautiful. And you too, Laura. You never

needed to learn in the same way ; but to think of you being suddenly cut off—or lingeringly—God knows what that old savage has in mind !—it's horrible ! ”

“ Because you can only see the physical act.”

“ No, I tell you,” he denied violently ; “ it's because I feel the waste. You must live. Didn't your father give his life for that ? Do you want his—sacrifice—to be in vain ? ”

“ Live ; yes,” she answered him. “ But you're confusing terms. Consciously, I believe. He brought us here because we were spoiling our lives, as he had spoilt his life ; and surely if he has taught us anything it is that a spoilt life is worse than death.”

“ Admitted, Laura ; admitted. And he's achieved that for us, hasn't he ? Can you picture us quarrelling as we used to ? The thing's laughable. If ever two lives were welded into one. . . . Laura ! . . . But if the police do come, what do you propose to do ? ”

“ I don't propose to do anything. We shall be as helpless to resist freedom as we are to resist captivity. If your father doesn't settle us first they'll take us away by force. Unless we choose to settle ourselves.”

“ Are you seriously proposing that ? ”

“ I don't know, Stephen. I don't think I have the courage. Not by myself. Not unless you stand by me.”

The picture suddenly came back to him. The huddled body toppling over the cliff ; the mud opening—and closing !

"But your father had a motive," he cried. "If it were really to save you, Laura. . . . I don't know. . . . And then, his life was ended anyway. I'm not saying it was easy. It was magnificent. But we've all our life to live. . . . It's the imagination that revolts !"

"I still have my knife," she told him.

"Ah ! That would be easier. Yet even so. . . ."

It was difficult to face the prospect of death with the night still dark about them. The moonlight and the firelight, the white mists and the shadows, left the spirit unsteady and uncertain.

"In the morning, Laura ; perhaps. . . ."

"Thank you, Stephen."

But he revolted, all the same. It wasn't for this that they had come. He tried to get clear what the motive had been. "The truth shall make you free"—disconnected phrases came back to him—"It's spiritual courage you'll need, not physical courage." Was Laura right after all?

"And if we accept freedom, what then ?"

"We accept it at the price of renouncing each other."

"But—Laura——."

"Listen, Stephen," she spoke more severely ; "can you seriously consider a life of love and happiness knowing that your father's curse is on us ?"

"But a curse—that's superstition !" he protested.

"In the vulgar sense, yes. But the curse wouldn't be in his anger, but in our conscience. We should come to hate each other. That would be our

heritage—a heritage of hate. Remembering your father here you would hanker for your lost ideal, and I should only remind you of how your ideal came to be shattered. You would reproach yourself too. To abandon him here—your father still, in spite of your repulsion—knowing him given over to such a life, to such passions—you'd be driven to return, as my father was, to try a second time to save him. Do you want such history to repeat itself? You see, that's the stumbling-block. If you leave him unappeased behind you—like sailing away from a ship in distress. You might do so saying that help was hopeless, but something would urge you to stay and go down together."

"Are you suggesting," Stephen cried in sudden comprehension, "that I should join him, Laura?"

"That makes a third alternative."

"It would never have occurred to me. Never ! . . . And it's horrible ! . . . And you really think that I could wean him from—all this ? . . . You want me to turn savage too ?"

"It would give him his second chance."

"My God, Laura ! . . . And produce more Peepees, eh ?"

"I thought you liked Peepee."

"But not for keeps !"

The sudden prospect of a life of savagery set his spirit in shocked revolt. He needed the tonic of wild peoples and wild places ; he knew it ; but as a tonic only, not a diet. His wanderings and adventures had given him a sane perspective. Man's part was to dominate, not to be absorbed. His training had schooled him to an easy fraterniza-

tion with Arab, Kanaka, Malay, to a careless familiarity with desert, sea, and jungle ; but these were the darkness on the fringe of light, and it was the challenge of the darkness that stirred him, not the seduction. He moved with mind aloof ; not patronizingly, not as a mere spectator ; but conscious nevertheless of a spiritual superiority, as sanity is superior to madness. Yet how aloof he had never realized till this moment. To abandon Laura for the sake of—Patala ! And to what purpose ? Yet he felt there was a purpose. Somehow to save him ; to wean him—his own expression. And hadn't Cartwright named the man a baby ? To retransform him into Spender, into the father he had idealized and worshipped ! And suddenly the memory of his mother came over him, warm, constraining, reawakening the old emotion. To redeem his father ! For a moment his imagination took fire. But the degrading accompaniments ! . . . And he saw them lowering his mother again into the grave ! . . .

"But this is all theory," he broke out. "How for a single minute can it be possible ? Would he accept me ? Would the authorities allow it ? And precisely what would you have me do ? Preach to him ? Set him a noble example ? . . . But it's impossible to reason clearly at night. In the morning we shall know what to do."

"It was morning last time, yet we made a dreadful mistake."

"That remains to be seen."

"Then we're no farther than when we started."

"We're this much farther, that nothing now

can harm our love." He drew impulsively beside her, taking her in his arms. "And isn't that what your father set himself to ensure? Whether we live or die, together or divided, our love remains. A fellow hankers for a bit of happiness, but we know now how to estimate that. We've seen how this sorry business came about; and even if we can't see how it's going to end at least we know how to keep our spirits free. And when the moment comes I think it will find us ready."

She crushed herself against him.

"I leave it to you," she said.

He had the impression that he had pledged himself to something. To be ready. Yet everything was implied in that. It was a poor sort of victory, dragged unwillingly from defeat. But the battles of the spirit aren't won to the braying of trumpets. He tried to find consolation in his readiness, assuring himself that he had made no idle boast. But he had to keep his imagination clear of details. The mud didn't bear thinking on! . . . Laura's breathing told him she was asleep. She became a weight on his arms. He laid her down on the sand, settling himself to watch over her. There would be no sleep for him. . . . Her confidence in him was stimulating, yet he felt wretchedly unhappy.

The weary vigil began.

He thought he had already passed the final proof that morning in Patala's shelter. But that seemed nothing now. He had made a dramatic choice with spectators to observe him. But here—even Laura was asleep. And in spite of Laura's alterna-

tives it wasn't a matter now of choosing between a clear right and a clear wrong. It was a matter of keeping the spirit steady against a pressure of vague bewilderment. Like planting a banner in a morass ! All that he had suffered seemed a pale premonition of what he was suffering now. At least he had battled against palpable obstructions towards a definite goal. But here there was nothing to do but watch ; to watch through a night without end for a morning without promise. It was to sound the very bottom of bitterness. He played with illusory hopes, to be brought up against a sudden confrontation of reality. He tried to beat the visions from his eyes. Laura's serene composure emphasized his agony. He wanted to waken her ; and only by an exhausting effort of the spirit wrestled down his temptation. Yet it recurred with undiminished importunity, besieging him throughout the night like a tormenting insect. He would lay his hand on her, and draw it back as though stung. For occupation he fed the fire, slowly, with single twigs, watching them flare up, settle to a red luminosity, and fade into blackened ash. The life of a man ! He brewed some tea, again tempted to waken Laura to share it. It was wonderful that she should sleep so. If he had not known her so well her philosophic resignation to her father's death would have shocked and deceived him. She could even take Spender's part. But had he not himself come to take Cartwright's part ? It was suddenly clear to him that Laura had been sharing in Spender's agony. " I watched and waited." Two nights, not ten ; but enough to

teach her what such a vigil might mean. And like Spender too she had known the bitterness of betrayal, learning to suffer with him as Stephen had learnt to suffer with Cartwright ! . . . There was something illuminating here, but baffling too ; like a vision behind a veil. It was as though for a moment he could see the looms of destiny at work. He was conscious of a force, a rhythm. And over it a nameless dominance, unadjustable without violence to the categories that he knew. Not Providence, not Nemesis, not Karma. Simply a Power by which events fell harmoniously into order as though bearing in themselves their own necessity. Yet more ; far more. It set him brooding, darkly, excitedly. He reached to no clear comprehension, but he was reconciled to his perplexities. It wasn't necessary for a man to see his way. Even to consider it possible was a vanity. Circumstances forestall, elude, betray. But let him be faithful to the purpose in him. He thought he understood Cartwright's mystic creed at last—faithful to an idea ! . . . The stars shifted round the pole. The moon fell towards the hills. But reluctantly, imperceptibly. Yet he felt strangely at peace, fortified to meet what the morning might bring. And Laura trusted him. She trusted him. . . . He must have slept.

It was full daylight when he awoke. Laura was vigorously shaking him.

"Why ? . . . What ? . . ." he asked.

"Listen ! They've come !"

There was a shouting on the cliff above them.

And suddenly a voice they knew, but for the moment couldn't recognize :

“Hallo, you, down below there !”

“Hallo !” they hailed excitedly back.

“Man ! I'm in time then ?” the voice came to them again. “But this encourages a Christian to say his prayers !”

It was Gregory.

CHAPTER XXVI

THEY watched eagerly for him to appear. They caught a glimpse of struggling figures, and they heard his voice in rapid protestation amid a confused clamour of cries and shouts. But the commotion receded from the cliff edge, and all was silent again. For a long time they waited, listening ; but he didn't come. They climbed up the cliff to investigate. Seeing them appear the sentinels at the top sprang up to bar their passage, but as they sat down quietly, making no attempt to force their way through, they were allowed to remain. And now they could hear voices from Spender's shelter ; Gregory's voice particularly in a flood of argumentation, and occasionally Spender's voice in a gruff reply.

It was difficult immediately to pick up the thread of the talk. They gathered that Gregory was in full possession of the circumstances. Spender had had ample time to inform him while they had waited below—but they were left speculating on his sudden coming. Not that that mattered just now. Their attention became engrossed by the immediate matter of the dispute.

“Man, but it isn't possible !” Gregory was protesting. “Old anger will go mouldy like anything else. A fellow can't sit and nurse his wrath like a squalling brat. Put the wretched thing to

sleep, man ; and if it won't sleep, strangle it ! And don't you go talking about pride. There's a counterfeit that goes under the same name, a Devil's bastard which he tries to father on a man. It used to be a deadly sin when the priests really understood their surgery. You might as well ask me to admire a tumour or a mump. . . . You needn't expect any sympathy from me."

"Have I asked for sympathy ?"

"You've posed for it ; isn't that the same ? Good land, man, if only you had the eyes to see yourself ! Asked for sympathy ? Why, you've been grovelling for it, blubbering for it, under a mask of curses. A baby howls and a man swears, but it must sound pretty much the same to the recording angel. It's through people like you that the Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence. You think you can ride the high horse to the Judgment Seat. Well, so you can ; and you'll get justice all right. I don't pretend to be in the counsels of the Almighty, but I'm pretty sure you're not on the roll of the saints. Unless there are birthday honours for clowns up there too !"

"Stop, I tell you !"

"You can't bear a little hissing, can you ? You've been spoilt by applause. It's been mighty amusing to play coconut-shies with human heads. Amusing for your particular type of audience. But some of us don't laugh at that kind of thing. And it hurts you when we don't laugh. A glum face robs you of your triumph. Well, why not get rid of the glum face if it offends you ? Let me join those two down there."

"That's not your place."

"But man alive, haven't you been telling me that it's a man's place to join his friends? You'll never get me back alone by the way I came. I stand by those two. You can carry me off by force, but I'll return. You'll find me like a mosquito. I'll buzz and sting till you've squashed me. . . . Well, have you had enough?"

Spender didn't answer. Gregory continued :

"And by what feat of logic do you make out that those children's place is down there?"

"They inherit the guilt."

"But what the hell, man! You make a Christian swear. Were they even born when all this business began? And yet I don't know. Guilt's like a disease, and something's infected them. Things happen in this world which a Christian can't always understand. But you'd best leave vengeance to where it belongs. The Almighty's reserved that to himself because he can't trust it to us. It's like letting children play with fire. *Ecce signum!* You're a poor blasted old stump, aren't you, Spender?"

The flagellation continued, reducing Spender to dumbness. Once they heard him groan as though in pain. But Gregory was pitiless. At last Spender seemed to come to the end of his endurance. "For God's sake, no more!" he said.

Gregory allowed him a few minutes' respite. When he spoke again it was in a strangely gentle voice: "Man, don't you see I'm here to help you?"

"But you make no—allowance." Spender spoke

complainingly as though shaken from his sullen assurance.

"Come, that's better," Gregory encouraged him. "Lay your cards on the table. It'll do you a world of good to talk. And never mind me. I'm used to being father confessor, Poor old Cartwright, now! But if he'd told me a little more! Why, we'd have had you shaking hands long ago."

"Never!"

"Well, have it your own way. But you see he was capable of atonement. That's more than you credited him with. But here I am butting in again. Well, mum's the word. I'm nothing but ears."

"Capable of atonement?" Spender caught passionately at the phrase. "That is all you see. He made a clever end. You only see the end. You do not remember the beginning. His troubles now—all finished. But me? If I jump into the mud you will say, 'Poor old Spender!' Is that what you wish me to do?"

"Nothing so superlatively stupid, man! The cases aren't parallel. You've got to live out your redemption. You can't jump out of it. You were demanding a blood-offering, and you got it. But nobody wants your blood. But hang it! Mum!"

"And is it so easy—to live?"

Struggling haltingly for expression, speaking in short uneasy phrases, Spender gave vent at last to his stored-up bitterness of spirit. Stephen listened with head bowed, overwhelmed with an invading pity. In spite of all, this was his father whom his mother had taught him to reverence like something sanctified and elect. His father, brought face to

face with the memory of his magnificent youth, with the consciousness of his wasted manhood, with the prospect of his unprofitable old age. He was like some splendid animal goaded into an unreasonable fury, lusting for havoc. And yet with a man's conscience unsubdued in him to turn his victories into ashes. Cartwright's triumphant death, the unshaken defiance of the "white boy and girl," were red flags to his wrath. "For me? What is there left for me?" he circled about the complaint. "They have done well. They are content. Even that man. He lay and laughed at me, because I have become—what I have become. I cannot escape. They know it, and they mock me. But they shall not mock me, I shall crush them in my hands. . . ." He ended on a note of mingled menace and lamentation.

"But man, why should they mock you?" Gregory took him up pleadingly. "Go one better, instead of a million worse. Crush them, and they'll mock you from their grave. But if it's the laugh of them you want, show them that with twenty years of failure behind you you can yet make good."

"Fool! How can I—break my chains? With this girl? And this?"

Stephen knew that he was pointing to the mark on his forehead.

"Who's asking you to break? Why, man, it's your one chance of redemption. Good land, can't you see? Isn't there a work for you here among this people? If ever a bunch of orphans needed a dad! Was there ever a clearer case of Providence? Father them. Mother them. And as for Peepee!

Man alive, if I were thirty years younger I'd be proposing myself for son-in-law and heir apparent ! I should soon have Lobu smiling on the other side of his face. Peepee ! Why, she was sent to save you. A star ! A banner ! . . . But there ! . . . And now if you want a practical programme instead of a mush of words, here's what I'm proposing. Send these contemptuous white children about their business on the promise to return in ten years' time, and then let them compare lives with you and see who's made the best bid for mention in the divine despatches. Why, man, the boy will tell you that he's been painting pictures, and the girl that she's been washing his brushes and mixing his paints. I know all about them. And how'll that stand against what you'll have to show them ? The leadership of a people ! There are limits, of course. But what do you expect ? The whole world ? . . .” He rattled on, enthusing over the redeeming virtue of white leaven in a coloured race.

But Spender wasn't so easily convinced. Gregory's voluble banter seemed to settle him more firmly in his obstinacy. But Gregory showed no slackening. “Right you are, man,” he would exclaim, as Spender entrenched himself in sullen repetitions, “I'm prepared to go seven times round your old Jericho—seventy times seven if need be—but you won't stop me trumpeting for all that.” And to Spender's “I can't,” “It's impossible,” he would reply, “Very well, let me put it to you once again.” It was difficult to know whether he was making any impression, except that Spender

retorted with increasing emotion like a man suffering. But the argument plunged and wavered and turned upon itself like a rudderless ship in a high sea which Gregory with inexhaustible patience kept heading back into the wind. For a long while it continued so, till suddenly Spender cried in his autocratic way, "Enough! I will not have it. Did he not betray? There is no pardon!"

Gregory fell silent. It was as though all his effort had been wasted. Spender was back at his original position. The battle was to be fought again from the beginning, or to be given as lost.

"So, no pardon," he repeated, speaking with an unusual restraint. "Then I've one thing still to say, man. You can't see straight because of the beam in your own eye. Didn't you leave a girl behind you? Didn't you owe it to her to return? Good land, man, I shouldn't be so glib with your 'betray'!"

"She was also a Cartwright," Spender said.

"But she was a woman," Gregory retorted.

"Where a man fails, will a woman be true?"

"Why, what the hell!" Gregory exclaimed, shaken from his momentary quietude. "You poor, purblind, miserable, unillumined son of darkness! What do you know about women? Faith! Truth! Loyalty! The words sound mighty fine in your mouth. But the thing itself, the essence! And you speak like that of women! . . . Stupidity's as unanswerable as logic. . . . But what now, when you've got the facts?"

"I don't understand. What facts?"

"Are you speaking seriously, man?" Gregory

cried. "Do you mean that you still don't know? Man alive, then you shall have it! What's your grand complaint? That your friend deserted you when he was pledged to return, pledged by his honour. But you left your sweetheart with child. Wasn't that a pledge to return? And now——."

"With child?" Spender exclaimed.

"A boy. A magnificent youngster. But you've seen for yourself. And a woman who'll give you a son like that. . . . What do you mean by woman's loyalty? Where else do you look for a proof of it? But you set your pride above her honour."

"A boy, did you say?"

"Come, let me go and bring him."

"Stop!" Spender cried in an urgency of alarm.

"Do you mean—that boy? My son?"

"Your son. Do you ask for a better? And he worships you like a god. His mother taught him. Cartwright too. It's been the making of him."

"But he called me——. Do you know what he called me? Renegade! Despicable renegade!"

"In the heat of the moment. Come, he'll take that back."

"But—my God!—it's true!"

"Was true, perhaps. There's all the future. He'll be the first to confess it. Let me call him."

"No. I daren't face him. He's white. I dare not."

"Very well. No hurry. Take your time. Sleep on it. We shall have to spend the night here anyway. This old carcass of mine! To-morrow morning, say. Why, he'll be on his knees to you."

“ God ! And I would have shot him ! Smashed ! Routed ! ”

Spender, broken at last, sobbed like a child.

Gregory left him with Peepee, and under Lobu's escort went to join Stephen and Laura. He was surprised to find them at the top of the cliff. Their faces told him that they had heard.

An afternoon of explanations and confessions in the shelter of the cave. Gregory's part was soon told. Martha's confidences had troubled him. He felt there was something not altogether above board in Cartwright's expedition. Worrying over it he was fretted into a fever, and took a few days off from school. To fill his time he resorted to his usual occupation of sorting and annotating cards. Coming upon the picture of Patala he remembered Cartwright's emotion, and studying it more carefully he was suddenly aware of the truth. He knew now Cartwright's objective, but the riddle of the broken friendship left him puzzled and perturbed. He felt a growing anxiety for Stephen and Laura which at length goaded him into pursuit. The boy, despatched by Stephen for the police, met him hurrying to the rescue, and knowing him well confided the situation to him. He felt that police intervention might be disastrous, so he made the boy turn back with him to the encampment, assuring him that all would be well. He reached the encampment late in the evening, some hours after Stephen had left. He set out again the next morning, but with the fever still on him his “ old carcass ” had been unable to make the hollow before sundown.

He spent the night on the hills, and pushing on with the first of the light reached Patala's camp in the morning. "And man, to hear you answer up so hearty, it was better than all the quinine in the world!"

Stephen's story wasn't so simply disposed of. The boy was less concerned with events than with his doubts and scruples. "Hang it, man, but what happened?" Gregory was continually bringing him down to fact. With the fall of evening they left the cave; and on the platform outside—the scene of so many troubled confidences and counsels—the narrative was resumed, a turbid stream coursing uneasily among rocks and shoals.

At one moment Stephen sprang up. "I'm going to my father," he said. "That's the only way to settle it."

Gregory held him back, alarmed at the consequences of a premature intrusion.

"He'll send for you when he's ready," he declared. "Hang it, man, if you burst in on him with his spirit in dishabille he'll never forgive you."

Stephen sat down again, not entirely convinced.

He began to sentimentalize. He talked of his mother: "She would have gone to him,"

"A woman's privileged to peep," Gregory said. "A man will cut all sorts of capers in front of a woman, and won't know a moment's blush. But let him catch a male eye at the key-hole and there's the Devil to pay—cash!"

"You'd better stay," Laura joined forces with Gregory, and Stephen yielded.

"But if after all he doesn't send. . . ."

The night found him talking still, brokenly, excitedly, with a riotous and buffoon humour.

In the morning they awoke to find Peepee standing by them. Stephen was sober enough now. "Has my father sent for me?" he asked, rising alertly.

"He has gone away," she said.

"Gone away?" he cried. "You see now, if you hadn't stopped me. . . ."

Peepee turned to Gregory, still struggling among a confusion of memories thrown out of orientation.

"I have a message," she told him. "My father says, 'In ten years let them come again.'"

"In ten years? . . . Why, splendid man!" Gregory exclaimed, comprehension returning to him at a single leap. "I knew he'd battle through. Do you take his meaning, Stephen?"

"Yes. . . . I think so. . . . But still. . . ."

"Well, there's an end to your doubts, man. Rub out the question-mark and put in a full-stop! And there's no place for 'But still.' . . . But come, breakfast; and then let's trek."

Half an hour later they were on the move, taking with them only a minimum of kit. No signs of the camp remained at the top of the cliff. Spender's men had vanished. But looking back they saw on the peak above them a single figure outlined against the sky. It was Spender. With his arms folded across his pelt, the gold glittering at his brow, he was indistinguishable except for his proud bearing from the savages he commanded. He made no

signal. They respected his reserve, turning from him without a hail, without a salute.

Peepee accompanied them to the crest of the ridge. There they parted from her. But for a long time if they looked behind they had her in sight, shining above them, a star-like pledge of a soul's redemption.

"I spare you the police business," Gregory wrote. "It was Jappy of the Japs. But after all we did romance a little. And the natives backed us up, staunchly denying all knowledge of the affair. But I spare you that. And in return—if you must squeeze a saleable yarn out of all this—please spare Spender the desecration of prying into that night's Gethsemane. He made his decision; let it rest at that. You literary spiders like to suck at everything that blows into your web; but when a man's been sweating blood it isn't gentlemanly—even in the interests of High Art—to go measuring it in gills and gallons. It's bad enough to hear Stephen sentimentalizing over it, though for his own sake it's a healthy exercise. Helps to purge out the prig in him. . . . But what's more to your purpose is to give some sort of answer to that chap Waters. Mind you, I don't know that he would press his theories to Cartwright's conclusions. But you can take it that those two are cured. The shadow has lifted. The truth has made them free. But it took them a day or two to come round, and I was wise enough to leave them to it. Another scene for your inquisitive imagination! But they're cured now. And what's cured them?"

Merely sharing a common danger ? That doesn't satisfy me. I was under Waters myself after the earthquake. I believe he's got hold of the truth. To face up to the naked vision of yourself is an almighty fine antidote to most of our spiritual stupidities. And if you see the naked vision of yourself in your fathers, doesn't the principle still hold good ? The past has us in its tentacles whether we like it or no. The only hope is that—as the Buddhists say—out of the mud comes the lotus. I think it is so in this case. Sometimes the salvation of the children is visited on the parents. . . . And man, if your pen could rise to it, you'd describe our jolly homeward trip—after the police had done with us, still unreconciled to the impossibility of producing Cartwright's body, after they had so exactly warned him, too ! You remember the push-cars ? They're the stuff to clear your head of fumes. We touched at forty miles on that downward spin from Hori. I swear to it. With John Chinaman blowing his lungs out whistling round the bends. And where are there anything but bends ? Then to meet the buffaloes again ! And the charming little *né-san* at Nisui ! We wasted a day there for her sake ! And at last at Taihoku, for grand climax—good land, man !—the condemnatory joys of Martha ! Frowns in welcome and smiles in judgment ! 'I told you something would happen to that baby between you ! . . . Oh, my lamb !' I had to rub the Taiwan mist from my goggles ! But man alive, she's the only sane one of the party. . . . Self included !

“The children will soon be off for Europe

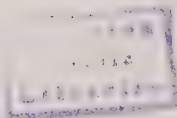
where Stephen intends to study art : ' Seriously, you know. No more dabbling.'

" Ten years ! Shall I be alive to see ? . . . "

I laid the letter down.

And like a miracle about me were the hedge-rows and the buttercups, the church-towers and the grazing sheep. Had I been wildly dreaming ? Did I regret my dream, hankering amidst this beatitude for an enchantment beyond recall, a spell, a heat, a savour, unknown to our gentle air ? But after the fury and fantasy of the East, how good it is—the wholesome assured serenity of England !

THE END







✓ KR-130-393